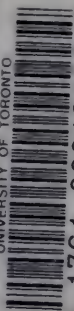


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LITERARY AND SOCIAL  
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LITERARY  
AND  
SOCIAL JUDGMENTS.

BY  
W. R. GREG.

FOURTH EDITION, CONSIDERABLY ENLARGED.

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## LITERARY AND SOCIAL JUDGMENTS.

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### MADAME DE STAEL.

“THE Life and Times of Madame de Staël:” what a promise of vivid interest does not the title hold forth! What a host of images and ideas start into life at the spell of that name, and silently group themselves around the central figure! Necker, the object of her life-long worship, with his grand position, his *bourgeois* intellect, and his rare integrity;—Madame Necker, the rigid mother, the tender wife, the faithful friend—puritanical, precise, *bornée*, but not ungenial;—Gibbon, at first the phlegmatic lover, afterwards the philosophic friend, but always brilliant, fascinating, and profound;—Louis de Narbonne, perhaps the most perfect specimen then extant of the finished noble of the *ancien régime*, polished to the core, not varnished merely on the surface;—Talleyrand, the subtlest and deepest intellect of his time, and long the intimate associate of Madame de Staël;—Napoleon, her relentless persecutor;—Benjamin Constant and

Schlegel, her steady and attached allies :—these men form the circle of which she was the centre and the chief.

Then the “times” in which she lived ! She saw the commencement and the close of that great social earthquake which overthrew the oldest dynasty in Europe, shook society to its foundation, unsettled the minds of men to their inmost depths, turned up the subsoil of nations with a deeper ploughshare than Destiny had ever yet driven, and opened the way for those new social ideas and those new political arrangements which are still operating and fermenting, and the final issue, the “perfect work,” of which our children’s children may not live to see. Her life, though only prolonged through half a century, was coeval with that series of great events which, for magnitude and meaning, have no parallel in human history ; by all of which she was more or less affected ; in some of which she took a prominent and not uninfluential part. She was born while the house of Bourbon was at the height of its meretricious splendour and its reckless profligacy ; she lived to see it return, after its tragic downfall and its dreary banishment, to a house that had been “swept and garnished,”—little better and no wiser than before. She saw the rise, the culmination, and the setting of Napoleon’s meteor-star ; she had reached the pinnacle of her fame while he was laying the foundation of his ; and she, shattered and way-worn, was beginning to look forward to her final rest, when his career was closed for ever in defeat and exile.

But it is not of the period in which she lived that we think first or most naturally when we hear the name of Madame de Staël: it is of the writer whose wondrous genius and glowing eloquence held captive our souls in "the season of susceptible youth," of the author of the *Lettres sur Rousseau*, who sanctioned and justified our early partiality for that fascinating rhapsodist,—of *L'Allemagne*, from whose pages we first imbibed a longing to make the riches of that mighty literature our own,—of *Corinne*, over whose woes and sorrows so many eyes have wept delicious tears; of that dazzling admixture of deep thought, tender sentiment, and brilliant fancy, which give to her writings a charm possessed by the productions of no other woman—and, in truth, of but few men.

Anne-Marie Louise Necker was born at Paris in 1766. Both her parents were remarkable persons. Her father, James Necker, a simple citizen of Geneva, began life as clerk in a banker's office in Paris, speedily became a partner, and by skill, diligence, sound judgment, and strict integrity, contrived in the course of twenty years to amass a large fortune and to acquire a varied reputation. While accumulating wealth, however, he neglected neither literature nor society. He studied both philosophy and political economy; he associated with the Encyclopedists and eminent literati of the time; his house was frequented by some of the most remarkable men who at that period made the Parisian salons the most brilliant in Europe; and he found time, by various writings on financial matters, to

create a high and general estimation of his talents as an administrator and economist. His management of the affairs of the French East India Company raised his fame in the highest political circles, while, as accredited agent for the Republic of Geneva at the Court of Versailles, he obtained the esteem and confidence alike of the Sovereign and the ministers. So high did he stand both in popular and courtly estimation, that, shortly after the accession of Louis XVI., he was appointed, although a foreigner, Comptroller-General of the Finances. He held this post for five years, till 1781;—and contrived not only to effect considerable savings by the suppression of upwards of 600 sinecures, but also in some small degree to mitigate and equalise taxation, and to introduce a system of order and regularity into the public accounts to which they had long been strangers. As proved by his celebrated *Compte rendu*, which, though vehemently attacked, was never successfully impugned, he found a deficit of 34 millions when he entered office, and left a surplus of 10 millions when he quitted it,—notwithstanding the heavy expenses of the American war. In the course of his administration, however, Necker had inevitably made many enemies, who busied themselves in undermining his position at court, and overruled the weak and vacillating attachment of the king. Necker found that his most careful and valuable plans were canvassed and spoiled by his enemies in the Council, where he was not present to defend them, and that, in fact, he had not and could not have fair play while he



continued excluded from the Cabinet. He demanded, therefore, the entry of the Privy Council, and resigned when it was refused him; though earnestly requested to remain by those who knew how valuable his reputation was to a discredited and unpopular court, unwilling as they were to submit to his measures or honestly adopt his plans. Necker did not choose to be so used; and he retired to write the celebrated work on the Administration of the Finances, which at once placed him on the pinnacle of popularity and fame. Eighty thousand copies were sold; and henceforth Necker was the man on whom all eyes were turned in every financial crisis, and to whom the nation looked as the only minister who could rescue them from the difficulties which were daily thickening around them.

Then followed the reckless administration of Calonne, whose sole principle was that of "making things pleasant," and who, in an incredibly short time, added 1646 millions to the capital of the debt, and left an annual deficit of 140 millions, instead of an annual excess of ten. Brienne attacked him, and succeeded him; but things went on from bad to worse, till, when matters were wholly past a remedy, in August 1788, Necker was recalled and reinstated. What he *might* have done, on the occasion of this second ministry, had he been a man of commanding genius and unbending will, it is useless and perhaps impossible to conjecture. Surrounded with numberless perplexities; beset at once by the machinations of unscrupulous enemies who counterworked him in secret, and by the embar-

rassments which every predecessor had accumulated in his path ; borne into power on a tide of popular expectations which no popularity could enable him to satisfy ; set down to labour at the solution of a perhaps insoluble problem ; face to face with a crisis which might well stagger the most dauntless courage and confuse the clearest head ; famine around him, bankruptcy before him ; and all other voices gradually lost in one " which every moment waxed louder and more terrible—the fierce and tumultuous roar of a great people, conscious of irresistible strength, maddened by intolerable wrongs, and sick of deferred hopes ;"—perhaps no human strength or wisdom could have sufficed for the requirements of that fearful time. Perhaps no human power could then have averted the catastrophe. What Necker might have done had he acted differently, and been differently made, we cannot say. What he did was to struggle with manly, but not hopeful, courage, for a terrible twelve months ; using his great credit to procure loans, spending his vast private fortune to feed the famishing populace of Paris ; commencing the final act of the long inchoate revolution, by assembling the States-General ; insuring its fearful triumph by the decisive measure of doubling the numbers of the *tiers-état*, and permitting the States to deliberate in common ; devising schemes of finance and taxation which were too wise to be palatable and too late to save ; composing speeches for the monarch to deliver, which the queen and the courtiers ruined and emasculated before they were

made public ; and bearing the blame of faults and failures not his own. At length his subterranean enemies prevailed ; he received his secret *cong e* from the king in July 1789, and reached Basle, rejoicing at heart in his relief from a burden of which, even to one so passionately fond of popularity as he was, the weight was beginning to be greater than the charms.

The people were furious at the dismissal of their favourite ; the Assembly affected to be so. Riots ensued ; the Bastille was stormed ; blood was shed ; the Court was frightened ; and Necker was once more recalled. The royal messenger overtook him just as he was entering Switzerland, with the command to return to Paris, and resume his post. He obeyed the mandate with a sad presentiment that he was returning to be a useless sacrifice in a hopeless cause, but with the conviction that duty left him no alternative. His journey to Paris was one long ovation ; the authorities everywhere came out to greet him ; the inhabitants thronged around his path ; the populace unharnessed his horses and drew his carriage a great part of the way ; the minister drank deeply of the intoxicating cup of national gratitude and popular applause ; and if he relished it too keenly and regretted it too much, at least he used it nobly, and had earned it well. It would have been far better for his own fame and happiness if he had not returned to power : it could scarcely have been worse for his adopted country. His third and last administration was a series of melancholy and perhaps inevitable failures. The torrent of popular violence

had become far too strong to stem. The monarchy had fallen to a position in which it was impossible to save it. Necker's head, too, seems to have been somewhat turned by his triumph. He disappointed the people and bored the Assembly. The stream of events had swept past him, and left him standing bewildered and breathless on the margin. "Les temps étaient bien changés pour lui, et il n'était plus ce ministre à la conservation duquel le peuple attachait son bonheur un an auparavant. Privé de la confiance du roi, brouillé avec ses collègues, excepté Montmorin, il était négligé par l'Assemblée, et n'en obtenait pas tous les égards qu'il eût pu en attendre. L'erreur de Necker consistait à croire que la raison suffisait à tout, et que, manifestée avec un mélange de sentiment et de logique, elle devait triompher de l'entêtement des aristocrates et de l'irritation des patriotes. Necker possédait cette raison un peu fière qui juge les écarts des passions et les blâme ; mais il manquait de cette autre raison plus élevée et moins orgueilleuse, qui ne se borne pas à les blâmer, mais qui sait aussi les conduire. Aussi, placé au milieu d'elles, *il ne fut pour toutes qu'une gêne et point un frein*. Il avait blessé l'Assemblée, en lui rappelant sans cesse et avec des reproches le soin le plus difficile de tous, celui des finances : il s'était attiré en outre le ridicule par la manière dont il parlait de lui même. Sa démission fut acceptée avec plaisir par tous les partis. Sa voiture fut arrêtée à la sortie du royaume par le même peuple qui l'avait naguère traînée en triomphe ; il fallut un ordre de l'Assemblée

pour que la liberté d'aller en Suisse lui fût accordée. Il l'obtenait bientôt, et se retira à Coppet, pour y contempler de loin une révolution qu'il était plus propre à observer qu'à conduire."\*

If the society of few men is more interesting or instructive than that of the retired statesman, who, having played his part in the world's history, stands aside to watch at leisure the further progress of the mighty drama, and having served his country faithfully and laboriously during his years of vigour and maturity has earned a right to repose in the decline of life; who contemplates with a mind enriched by reflection, and not soured by failure, the evolution of those great problems of human destiny *quorum pars magna fuit*, and brings the experience of the man of action to modify the conclusions of the man of thought; and who—with that serenity of soul which is the last achievement of wisdom and of virtue, and which belongs only to those who have fought the good fight, striven through the angry tempest, and reached the quiet haven—can look with a vivid interest, which has no touch of scorn, on the combatants who are still intent upon the battle or struggling in the storm, can aid them by his counsel and cheer them by his sympathy;—on the other hand, there are few sadder spectacles than that presented by the politician cast out from power, unable to accept his fate, and sitting unreconciled, mourning and resentful, amid the ruins of his

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\* Thiers. "Révolution Française," i. p. 199.

greatness. Such was Necker in his last retirement. For a long time he said he could think of nothing but the *coup de foudre* which had overthrown him. In one short year he had fallen from the pinnacle of prosperity to the depths of disgrace and neglect; and as he had relished the former more keenly perhaps than befitted a philosopher, so he felt the latter more bitterly than became a wise man or a Christian. His mortification and regret, too, were enhanced by a somewhat morbid conscientiousness; \* he could not shake off the idea that there was something culpable in failure; he felt that he had not been equal to the crisis, and that he had committed many errors; he could not divest himself of the dread that his own measures might have let loose that tide of national fury which was now so fearfully avenging the heaped-up wrongs of centuries; and the annoyance of failure was aggravated by the sense of guilt. Besides all this, he loved France too

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\* " Cette terreur du remords a été toute puissante sur la vie de mon père : il étoit prêt à se condamner dès que le succès ne répondait pas à ses efforts, sans cesse il se jugeait lui-même de nouveau. On a cru qu'il avait de l'orgueil, parcequ'il ne s'est jamais courbé ni sous l'injustice ni sous le pouvoir, mais il se prosternait devant un regret du cœur, devant le plus subtil des scrupules de l'esprit; et ses ennemis peuvent apprendre avec certitude qu'ils ont eu le triste succès de troubler amèrement son repos, chaque fois qu'ils l'ont accusé d'être la cause d'un malheur, on de n'avoir pas su le prévenir. Il est aisé de concevoir qu'avec autant d'imagination et de sensibilité, quand l'histoire de notre vie se trouve mêlée aux plus terribles évènements politiques, ni la conscience, ni la raison, ni l'estime même du monde ne rassurent entièrement l'homme de génie, dont l'ardente pensée, dans la solitude, s'acharne sur le passé." — *Vie privée de M. Necker, par Madame de Staël*, p. 55.

well not to mourn over her prospects and blush for her savagery and her crimes ; so he sat in his garden at Coppet, dejected and remorseful, pining over the past, and full of gloomy forebodings for the future ; and deaf to the consolations of his faithful wife and his adoring daughter. Gibbon, who saw much of him at this period of his career, says that he should have liked to show him in his then condition to any one whom he desired to cure of the sin of ambition. He passed whole days in gloom and silence ; all attempts to engage him in conversation were vain ; he felt like a vessel wrecked and stranded : “ Othello’s occupation was gone.”

By degrees, however, this depression left him, and he roused himself again to interest and action. He sent forth pamphlet after pamphlet of warning and remonstrance to hostile readers and unheeding ears. He offered himself to Louis as his advocate, when that monarch was brought to trial, and when his offer was declined, published a generous and warm defence of his old master. The remainder of his life was passed in the enjoyment of family affection, of literary labours, and of philosophical and religious speculations ; and he died in 1804 at the age of 72, happy in the conviction that he was only exchanging the society of his cherished daughter for that of his faithful and long-respected wife, who had died some years before.

On the whole, Necker was worthy of all honour and of long remembrance. History tells us of many greater statesmen, but of few better men. Without going so far as his enthusiastic daughter, who more than once

declares that his genius was bounded only by his virtue, we quite admit that his weakness and indecision were often attributable to his scrupulosity, and that more pliant principles and a harder heart might occasionally have fitted him better to deal with the evil days on which he had fallen. In truth, for such a crisis as that of the French Revolution he was somewhat too much of the preacher and the prude. He was well aware of his own deficiencies. He told Louis XVI. that if moral purity and administrative skill were all that was needed in the Government, he might be able to serve him, but that if ever the times should require a genius and a will like Richelieu's, then he must resign the helm to abler hands. His portrait and his justification may be given in a single sentence: he was a good man cast upon times that required a great man: his failure was the inevitable one of mediocrity intrusted with a task which scarcely the rarest genius could have successfully accomplished. Disinterested almost to a fault, in a period of unexampled rapacity and corruption; stainless and rigid in his morals amid universal laxity and licence; ardently and unaffectedly religious, in a howling wilderness of impiety and atheism; conscientious, while all around him were profligate and selfish; moderate, while every one else was excited and intemperate,—he was strangely out of place in that wild chaos of the old and new: the age demanded sterner stuff than he was made of—other services than he could render. “To be weak (says Carlyle),



is not so miserable ; *but to be weaker than our task.* Wo the day when they mounted thee, a peaceable pedestrian, on that wild Hippogryff of a Democracy, which, spurning the firm earth, nay, lashing at the very stars, no yet known Astolpho could have ridden !”

Madame Necker, too, was in her way remarkable enough. The daughter of a Swiss Protestant minister of high repute for piety and talent, and herself early distinguished both for beauty and accomplishments, her spotless character and superior intellectual powers attracted the admiration of Gibbon during his early residence at Lausanne. He proposed and was accepted ; but his father, imagining that his son might well aspire to some higher connexion, was very indignant, and forbade the fulfilment of the engagement. Gibbon submitted, and moralized : “ I sighed as a lover (says he), and obeyed as a son, and Mademoiselle Curchod is now the wife of the favoured minister of a great kingdom, and sits in the high places of the earth.” They renewed their acquaintance in after years, and remained fast friends till death. There is something to our feelings very touching in this lasting attachment between those who had been lovers in their youth, but who had been prevented from uniting their lots in life ; and the letters of Madame Necker, many of which are preserved, give us a most pleasing impression of both her character and powers, and convey the idea of far greater tenderness and poetry of soul than, judging from other sources of information, she was generally

supposed to possess. Faithfully and ardently attached to her husband, whose consolation and strength she had supplied during long years of trial, prosperity, and sorrow, and who repaid her with a fondness even more feminine than her own, she had yet much true, warm, and watchful affection to spare for her early and now famous friend. In 1792 she writes to Gibbon from Coppet,—

“Nous vous attendrons ici, et les charmes de votre société nous feront oublier encore une fois les peines de la vie. Nous nous réunissons, M. Necker et moi, pour vous offrir l'hommage d'une tendre amitié ; et il me semble qu'en me doublant ainsi, je répare auprès de vous tout ce que le temps m'a fait perdre. . . . Malgré votre silence volontaire, malgré le silence involontaire que j'ai gardé avec vous, vous n'avez jamais cessé un instant d'être l'objet de mon admiration, et de cette tendre et pure affection sur laquelle le temps ne peut avoir d'empire. Vos ouvrages ont fait mes délassemens les plus doux. . . . Vos paroles sont pour moi ces fleuves de lait et de miel de la terre promise ; et je crois entendre leur doux murmure : cependant je regrette encore le plaisir que j'avais à vous entretenir pendant le jour, de mes pensées de la veille. Je vivais ainsi deux fois avec vous, dans le temps passé et dans le temps présent ; et ces temps s'embellissaient l'un par l'autre :—puis-je me flatter de retrouver ce bonheur dans nos allées de Coppet ? Mille tendres amitiés.”

Again,—

“Vous m'avez toujours été cher, Monsieur ; mais l'amitié que vous montrez à M. Necker ajoute encore à celle que vous m'inspirez à tant de titres ; et je vous aime à présent d'une double affection. . . . Nous pensons souvent, Monsieur, aux jours pleins de charmes que nous avons passés avec vous à Genève. J'ai éprouvé pendant cette époque un sentiment nouveau pour moi, et peut-être pour beaucoup de gens. Je réunissais dans un même lieu, et par une faveur bien rare de la Providence, une des douces et pures affections de ma jeunesse, avec celle qui fait mon sort sur la terre, et qui le rend si digne d'envie. . . .

“ Quel prix mon cour n'attache-t-il point à votre santé, à l'intérêt que votre amitié répand sur notre retraite. En arrivant ici, en n'y retrouvant que les tombeaux de ceux que j'ai tant aimé, vous avez été pour moi comme un arbre solitaire, dont l'ombre couvre encore le désert qui me sépare des premières années de ma vie. . . . L'ame de M. Necker est embrasée par la douleur des évènements, et j'ai besoin de toutes les ressources de l'amitié la plus tendre pour faire diversion aux tourmens qu'il endure. Votre conversation me donnera des moyens en ce genre, auxquels il est impossible de résister ; cependant votre bonheur n'est trop cher pour que je voulusse vous faire perdre aucun des instans de la société dont vous jouissez. Revenez à nous quand vous serez rendu à vous-même ; c'est le moment qui doit toujours appartenir à votre première et à votre dernière amie :—je ne saurais découvrir encore lequel de ces deux titres est le plus doux et le plus cher à mon cœur.”

When Gibbon left Lausanne for London in 1793, to undergo a painful and critical operation, Madame Necker writes once more :

“ Vous m'annonciez de Douvres, Monsieur, une lettre par le courier prochain ; je l'attends encore et chaque jour avec plus d'angoisse. Je me consume en conjectures inquiétantes. Cependant il faut être juste ; vous ne pouvez penser à nous aussi souvent que nous vous rapprochons de notre cœur. A Londres tout vous ramène aux idées de ce monde, tandis que tout nous en éloigne ici ; près de vous les souvenirs que vous me rappeliez m'étaient doux, et les idées présentes que vous faisiez naître s'y réunissaient sans peine ; l'enchainement d'un grand nombre d'années semblait faire toucher tous les temps l'un à l'autre, avec une rapidité électrique ; vous étiez à la fois pour moi à vingt ans et à cinquante ; loin de vous, les différens lieux que j'ai habité ne sont plus que les pierres itinéraires de ma vie ; il m'avertissent de tous les milles que j'ai déjà parcourus.”

It is difficult to believe that the woman, who, at the age of fifty, could write with this simple and overflowing tenderness to the friend of her youth, could be the cold and almost rigid puritan she is represented.

There seems, however, to have been a certain reserve in her character which approached to *roidueur*; she was pre-eminently a woman of principle, and lived perhaps too much by rule and line to be easy and amiable in the general intercourse of the world. This peculiarity rendered her peculiarly unfit to manage or even to comprehend her daughter's nature, which was as full of vehemence and *abandon*, as hers was of strictness and precision; and in one of her letters she intimates how much she felt the want of an "intermediaire ou plutôt un intèrprète" between them. Certain it is that she contrived to give to those around her the impression of a somewhat unamiable severity of virtue and frigidity of temperament, and though universally esteemed and greatly admired, was too faultless to be generally loved.

How such a child as Mademoiselle Necker came to spring from two parents who resembled her so little, were a vain conjecture. She was from the first the very incarnation of genius and of impulse. Her precocity was extraordinary, and her vivacity and vehemence both of intellect and temperament baffled all her mother's efforts at regulation and control. Her power of acquisition and assimilation was immense. At twelve years of age she wrote a drama of social life, which was acted by herself and her young companions. Her remarkable talent for conversation, and for understanding the conversation of others, even at that early period, attracted the attention and excited the affectionate interest of many of the celebrated men

who frequented her father's salon ; and in spite of Madame Necker's disapproving looks, they used to gather around her, listening to her sallies, and provoking her love of argument and repartee. Gibbon, the Abbé Raynal, Baron Grimm, and Marmontel, were among these *habitués* of Necker's society at that time, and we can well comprehend the stimulus which intercourse with such minds must have given to the budding intellect of his daughter. The frivolity of French society was already wearing away under the influence of the great events which were throwing their shadows before them ; and even if it had not been so, Necker's own taste would have secured a graver and more solid tone than prevailed in common circles. The deepest interests of life and of the world were constantly under discussion. The grace of the old era still lingered ; the gravity of the new era was stealing over men's minds ; and the vivacity and brilliancy which have never been wholly lost at Paris, bound the two elements together in a strangely fascinating union. It was a very hot-bed for the development of a vigorous young brain like that of Mademoiselle Necker. Her father, too, aided not a little to call forth her powers ; he was proud of her talents, and loved to initiate her into his own philosophic notions, and to inoculate her with his generous and lofty purposes ; and from her almost constant intercourse with him, and his tenderness and indulgent sympathy—so different from her mother's uncaressing and somewhat oppressive formalism—sprung that vehement and earnest attach-

ment with which she regarded him through life. This affection coloured and modified her whole existence ; it was in fact the strongest and most pertinacious feeling of her nature ; and her delineation of it (in her *Vie privée de M. Necker*) is, in spite of its exaggeration, singularly beautiful and touching. It partook, perhaps, a little of the somewhat excessive vivacity which characterised all her sentiments : \* it seems in its impressive fervour to have resembled rather the devotion of a woman to a lover she adores, than the calm and tender love of a daughter to a cherished parent. Indeed she more than once, in her writings, regrets that they belonged to different generations, and declares that Necker was the only man she had ever known to whom she could have consecrated her life.

At the age of twenty she had attained a dangerous reputation as a wit and a prodigy ; she was passionately fond of the brilliant society in which she lived,

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\* We remember to have heard a rather amusing exemplification of this. Whilst living at Coppet, a coachman of her father's had overturned some of his guests, who, however, were not injured. When she heard of it, her first thought was " *Mon Dieu ! il aura pu verser mon père.*" She rang the bell, and summoned the unfortunate coachman instantly to her presence. As soon as he appeared, she opened out upon the astonished victim thus: " *François ! savez-vous que je suis une femme d'esprit ?*" Poor François, not knowing whether he stood on his head or his tail, could only answer by a bewildered stare. " *Sachez, donc (she continued), sachez donc que j'ai de l'esprit—beaucoup d'esprit—infiniment de l'esprit ;—eh bien ! tout l'esprit que j'ai je l'emploierai à vous faire passer votre vie dans un cachot si jamais vous versez mon père !*"

but set at nought its restraints, and trampled on its conventionalities and *bienséances* in a style that was then rare, especially among young women, but which the men forgave in consideration of her genius, and the women in consideration of her ugliness. Her intellect was preternaturally developed, but her heart seems not to have been touched; she wrote and spoke of love with earnestness, with grace, even with insight,—but as a subject of speculation and delineation only, not of deep and woeful experience. She made a *mariage de convenance* with as cool and business-like an indifference as if she had been the most cold and phlegmatic of women. She was a great heiress, and Eric Baron de Staël was a handsome man, of noble birth and good character. The consideration which appears to have chiefly decided the choice, both of herself and her parents, was that he was an *attaché* to the Swedish Embassy, was to become Ambassador himself, and was expected to *reside permanently in Paris*. Parisian society had now become, what it always remained, an absolute necessity of existence to Mademoiselle Necker; and in the arrangement she now made, she married it rather than the Baron. She never seems to have dreamed of domestic happiness, or at least of any satisfaction of the heart, in this deliberate selection of a husband; nor, we are bound to say, does she ever complain of not having found what she did not seek. She probably solaced herself by the proverb—true enough, but we should have thought exquisitely sad to a young and ardent girl of twenty—“Paris est le lieu

du monde où l'on se passe le mieux de bonheur." After the ceremony, we hear very little of M. de Staël, either from his wife or her friends. Sometimes circumstances separate them; sometimes reunite them; they seem to have lived harmoniously, but as comfortably when apart as when together. Her husband seems to have been tacitly ignored, except in as far as he made her "Madame l'Ambassadrice."

The three years that followed her marriage were probably the happiest of her life. She was in Paris, the centre of a varied and brilliant society, where she could not only enjoy intercourse with all the greatest and most celebrated men of that remarkable epoch, but could give free scope to those wonderful and somewhat redundant conversational powers which were at all times her greatest distinction. We can well imagine that her singular union of brilliant fancy, solid reflection, and French vivacity, must have made her, in spite of the entire absence of personal beauty, one of the most attractive and fascinating of women. The times too were beyond all others pregnant with that strange excitement which gives to social intercourse its most vivid charm. Everywhere the minds of men were stirred to their inmost depths; the deepest interests were daily under discussion; the grandest events were evidently struggling towards their birth; the greatest intellects were bracing up their energies for a struggle "such as had not been seen since the world was;" the wildest hopes, the maddest prospects, the most sombre terrors, were agitating society



in turn ; some dreamed of the regeneration of the world—days of halcyon bliss—a land flowing with milk and honey ; some dreaded a convulsion, a chaos, a final and irrecoverable catastrophe ; everything was hurrying onward to the grand *dénouement* ;—and of this *dénouement* Paris was to be the theatre, and Necker, the father of our heroine, the guiding and presiding genius. All her powers were aroused, and all her feelings stimulated to the uttermost ; she visited, she talked, she intrigued, she wrote ;—her first literary performance, the *Lettres sur Rousseau*, belong to this date. They are brilliant and warm in style ; but their tone is that of immaturity.

These days soon past. Then followed the Reign of Terror. And now it was that all the sterling qualities of Madame de Staël's character came forth. Her feelings of disappointment and disgust must have been more vivid than those of most, for her hopes had been pre-eminently sanguine, and her confidence in her father's powers and destiny unbounded. Now all was lost : her father was discarded, her monarch slain, her society scattered and decimated, and Paris had lost all its charms. Still she remained ; as Necker's daughter she was still beloved by many among the people ; as the wife of an Ambassador she was as inviolable as any one could be in those dreadful days. With indomitable courage, with the most daring and untiring zeal, and the most truly feminine devotion, she made use of both her titles and influence to aid the escape of her friends, and to save and succour the endangered.

She succeeded in persuading to temporary mercy some of the most ferocious of the revolutionary chiefs ; she concealed some of the menaced *émigrés* in her house ; and it was not till she had exhausted all her resources, and incurred serious peril to herself and her children, that she followed her friends into exile. Her husband, whose diplomatic character was suspended for a while, remained in Holland, to be ready to resume his functions at the first favourable opening. Madame de Staël joined her friends in England, and established herself in a small house near Richmond, where an agreeable society soon gathered round her, consisting, besides a few English, of M. de Talleyrand, M. de Narbonne (whose life she had saved by concealing him in her house, and then dismissing him with a false passport), M. d'Arblay (who afterwards married Miss Burney), and one or two female friends. Here, in spite of poverty, exile, and the mortification of failure, and the fearful tidings which reached them by nearly every post, they continued to lead a cheerful and not unprofitable life.

“ Their funds (says Miss Norris) were not in the most flourishing condition ; and the prospect of war did not favour the continuance of such remittances as they might otherwise hope to get ; yet their national gaiety seems to have borne them through their difficulties with considerable credit to themselves. We are told that this little party could afford to purchase only one small carriage, which took two persons, and that M. de Narbonne and Talleyrand alternately assumed the post of footman as they rode about to see the country, removing the glass from the back of the coach in order to join in the conversation of those within.

“ The neighbourhood they had chosen for their residence is one

naturally beautiful, and so characteristically English as to seem racy and fresh to the eye of a foreigner; grateful to those storm-tossed spirits must have been the scenes of rural peace which there spread about them; and still more grateful the kindly English hospitality which awaited them. It was, indeed, a new element infused into the half city, half rural life, of the then courtly suburb; and almost every day some fresh comer brought new tidings of trouble and desolation and narrow escapes."—P. 164.

The harmony of this little coterie continued without interruption: "the kindly hospitality" did not. The scandal-lovers of England began to think evil things, and to whisper evil thoughts respecting the tender friendship that subsisted between Madame de Staël and M. de Narbonne; they fancied it necessary to frown upon an affection which was alien to their national habits, and some of them, Miss Burney among the rest, began to look coldly upon the colony of foreigners, who ventured to live in England as naturally and as simply they could have done in France. There was no foundation whatever for the vulgar insinuations that were whispered about; but their existence can scarcely excite surprise. For in this country we do not understand that man and woman, unconnected by family ties, can be friends without being lovers; and what we do not understand it is our custom invariably to condemn. If we ever sanction such connections it is on the tacit condition that the affection shall be limited in its scope, untender in its character, and reserved in its manifestations. Devoted friendship, such as that which subsisted between Gibbon and Madame Necker, M. de Narbonne and Madame

de Staël, Chateaubriand and Madame Recamier,\* is to us a mystery and offence. Yet it is impossible to read without the deepest sympathy the description of Chateaubriand, wheeled into the drawing-room of Madame Recamier, when no longer able to walk thither, but unable to forego the accustomed society where he had spent every evening for so many happy and eventful years,—and of the touching attentions of his friend to cheer his sinking spirits and sustain and stimulate his failing faculties. Madame de Staël herself has left us a picture of a somewhat similar friendship,—that of the Prince Castel-forte for Corinne.

When the re-establishment of something like regular government in France in 1795 permitted the Swedish Ambassador to resume his functions, Madame de Staël returned to Paris, and passed her time very happily for the next four years, alternately there and with her father at Coppet. Then came the establishment of the Napoleonic rule, and with that ended Madame de Staël's peace and enjoyment for nearly fifteen years. Buonaparte disliked her, feared her, persecuted her, exiled her, and bullied and banished every one who paid her any attentions, or showed her any kindness. He first prohibited her residence in

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\* To all who wish to comprehend this peculiar and most beautiful phase of French character, we earnestly recommend a very interesting and affectionate tribute to the memory of Madame Recamier, which appeared in "Fraser's Magazine" for September 1849, from the pen of Mrs Austin.

Paris, then in France ; and exile from her native land, and from the scene of her social pleasures and social triumphs, was to her almost as dreadful as a sentence of death. Of course she repaid her tyrannical persecutor in his own coin, and with liberal interest. We need not seek far for the explanation of their mutual animosity. They were antipathic in their views, in their position, in every feeling of their hearts, in every fibre of their character. Madame de Staël was a passionate lover of constitutional liberty : Buonaparte was bent upon its overthrow. The brilliancy and varied attractions of Madame de Staël's society made her an actual *puissance* in Paris ; and Buonaparte hated rivalry, and could " bear no brother near the throne." He loved incense and homage ; and, after the 18th Brumaire, she would render him neither. She would not flatter him, and he could not in his heart despise her as he desired to do, and as he wished it to be imagined that he did. Then, whenever they met in society, she bored him dreadfully, and he snubbed her rudely. He was cold and reserved,—she was vehement and impulsive. She stigmatised him as an enemy to rational freedom ; and he pronounced her to be an intriguing and *exaltée* woman. They both loved influence dearly ; and neither would succumb to the influence of the other. All the Emperor's power and prestige could not extort from the woman one instant of submission or applause,—all the woman's weapons of fascination and persuasion were wasted and blunted on the impenetrable cuirasse of the despot. Their

hatred was something instinctive and almost physical, —as natural and incurable as that of cat and dog. Madame de Staël has left a very graphic description of the impression he produced upon her :—

“Loin de me rassurer, en voyant Buonaparte plus souvent il m'intimidait chaque jour d'avantage. *Je sentais confusément qu'aucune émotion du cœur ne pouvait agir sur lui.* [Hinc illæ lacrymæ : the lady felt herself disarmed before the man of cold heart.] Il regarde une créature humaine comme un fait ou comme une chose, mais non comme un semblable. Il ne hait pas plus qu'il n'aime ; il n'y a que lui pour lui ; tout le reste des créatures sont des chiffres. La force de sa volonté consiste dans l'imperturbable calcul de son egoïsme. . . . Ses succès tiennent autant aux qualités qui lui manquent, qu'aux talents qu'il possède. Ni la pitié, ni l'attrait, ni la religion, ni l'attachement à une idée quelconque, ne sauraient le détourner de sa direction principale. Chaque fois que je l'entendais parler j'étais frappée de sa supériorité ; elle n'avait pourtant aucun rapport avec celle des hommes instruits et cultivés par l'étude ou la société, tels que l'Angleterre et la France peuvent en offrir des exemples. Mais ses discours indiquaient le tact des circonstances, comme le chasseur a celui de sa proie. Quelquefois il racontait les faits politiques et militaires de sa vie d'une façon très-intéressante ; il avait même, dans les récits qui permettaient la gaité, un peu de l'imagination italienne. Cependant rien ne pouvait triompher de mon éloignement pour ce que j'apercevais en lui. Je sentais dans son ame *une épée froide et tranchante qui glaçait en blessant* : je sentais dans son esprit une ironie profonde à laquelle rien de grand ni ne beau, pas même sa propre gloire, ne pouvait échapper ; car il méprisait le nation dont il voulait les suffrages ; et nulle étincelle d'enthousiasme ne se mêlait à son besoin d'étonner l'espèce humaine.

“Ce fut dans l'intervalle entre le retour de Buonaparte [d'Italie] et son départ pour l'Égypte, c'est à dire, vers la fin de 1797, que je le vis plusieurs fois à Paris ; et *jamais la difficulté de respirer que j'éprouvais en sa présence ne put se dissiper.* J'étais un jour à table entre lui et l'Abbé Sièyes : singulière situation, si j'avais pu prévoir l'avenir ! J'examinais avec attention la figure de Buonaparte ; mais chaque fois qu'il découvrait en moi des re-

gards observateurs, il avoit l'art d'ôter à ses yeux toute expression, comme s'ils fussent devenus de marbre. Son visage était alors immobile, excepté un sourire vague qu'il plaçait sur ses lèvres à tout hasard, pour dérouter quiconque voudrait observer les signes extérieures de sa pensée." \*

During her fourteen years of exile, Madame de Staël led a wandering life; sometimes residing at Coppet; ever and anon returning for a short time to France, in hopes of being allowed to remain there unmolested, but soon receiving a new order to quit. She visited Germany twice, Italy once, and at length reached England, by way of Russia, in 1812. It was at this period of her life that she produced the works which have immortalised her—*De la Littérature*, *De l'Allemagne*, and *Corinne*, and enjoyed intercourse with the most celebrated men of Europe. Nevertheless, they were years of great wretchedness to her; the charms of Parisian society, † in which she lived, and moved, and

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\* *Considerations sur la Révolution Française*, ii. 187.

† "Je ne dissimule point que le séjour de Paris m'a toujours semblé le plus agréable de tous: j'y suis née; j'y ai passé mon enfance et ma première jeunesse; la génération qui a connu mon père, les amis qui ont traversé avec nous les périls de la Révolution, c'est là seulement que je puis les retrouver. Cet amour de la patrie qui a saisi les âmes les plus fortes, s'empare plus vivement encore de nous quand les goûts de l'esprit se trouvent réunis aux affections du cœur et aux habitudes de l'imagination. La conversation Française n'existe qu'à Paris, et la conversation a été, depuis mon enfance, mon plus grand plaisir. J'éprouvais une telle douleur à la crainte d'être privée de ce séjour, que ma raison ne pouvait rien contre elle. J'étais alors dans toute la vivacité de la vie, et c'est précisément le besoin des jouissances animées qui conduit le plus souvent au désespoir, car il rend la résignation bien difficile, et sans elle on ne peut supporter les vicissitudes de l'existence."—*Dix Années d'Exil*, p. 61.

had her being, were forbidden to her ; she was subjected to the most annoying and petty, as well as to the most bitter and cruel persecutions ; one by one her friends were prevented from visiting her ; or punished with exile and disgrace if they did visit her ; she was reduced nearly to solitude—a state which she herself describes as, to a woman of her vivacious feelings and irrepressible *besoin d'épanchement*, almost worse than death.\* The description of her sufferings during this part of her life, which she gives in her *Dix Années d'Exil*, renders that book one of the most harassing and painful we ever read ; and when we add to all that Buonaparte made her endure, the recollection of the incalculable amount of individual mischief and anguish which he inflicted on the two thousand peaceful English travellers, whom he seized in defiance of all law and justice, and detained for twelve of the best years

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\* “ On s'étonnera peut-être que je compare l'exil à la mort ; mais de grands hommes de l'antiquité et des temps modernes ont succombé à cette peine. On rencontre plus de braves contre l'échafauds que contre la perte de sa patrie.”—*Ibid.*, p. 79.

She says elsewhere : “ Les échafauds peuvent à la fin réveiller le courage ; mais les chagrins domestiques de tout genre, résultat du bannissement, affaiblissent le résistance, et portent seulement à redouter la disgrâce du souverain qui peut vous infliger une existence si malheureuse.”—*Considérations sur, &c.*, ii. 285.

Madame de Staël's principal enjoyment was always in society : she had little relish for, or appreciation of, the beauties of nature. “ Oh for the rivulet in the Rue du Bac ! ” she exclaimed, when some one pointed out to her the glorious Lake of Geneva. Many years later she said to M. Molé—“ Si ce n'était le respect humain, je n'ouvrirais pas ma fenêtre pour voir la baie de Naples ; tandis que je ferais cinq cents lieues pour aller causer avec un homme d'esprit.”



of their life in French prisons, we are compelled to feel that the irritating torments and privations which he was himself afterwards to undergo at St Helena—unworthy and oppressive as they sometimes were—were nothing but a well-proportioned and richly-merited retribution.

Several of the great men whose society she enjoyed during these memorable years of wandering, have left on record their impression of her genius and manners; and it is curious to observe how uniform and self-consistent this impression everywhere was. She seems to have excited precisely the same emotions in the minds both of German literati and of English politicians—vast admiration and not a little fatigue. Her conversation was brilliant in the extreme, but apt to become monologue and declamation. She was too vivacious for any but Frenchmen: her intellect was always in a state of restless and vehement activity; she seemed to need no relaxation, and to permit no repose. In spite of her great knowledge, her profound and sagacious reflections, her sparkling wit, and her singular eloquence, she nearly always ended by wearying even her most admiring auditors: she left them no peace; she kept them on the stretch; she ran them out of breath. And there were few of them who were not in a condition to relish the piquant *mot* of Talleyrand,—who, when some one hinted surprise that he who had enjoyed the intimacy of such a genius as Madame de Staël could find pleasure in the society of such a contrast to her as Madame Grant, answered in

that deliberate and gentle voice which gave point to all his sharpest sayings, "Il faut avoir aimé Madame de Staël pour savourer le bonheur d'aimer une bête!" Schiller, whom she infested dreadfully during her stay in Weimer in 1803-4, writes thus to Goethe:—

"Madame de Staël you will find quite as you have *à priori* construed her: she is all of a piece; there is no adventitious, false, pathological speck in her. Hereby it is that, notwithstanding the immeasurable difference in temper and thought, one is perfectly at ease with her, can hear all from her, and say all to her. She represents French culture in its purity, and under a most interesting aspect. In all that we name philosophy, therefore in all highest and ultimate questions, one is at issue with her, and remains so in spite of all arguing. But her nature, her feeling, is better than her metaphysics; and her fine understanding rises to the rank of genius. She insists on explaining everything, on seeing into it, measuring it; she allows nothing dark, inaccessible; whithersoever her torch cannot throw its light, there nothing exists for her. Hence follows an aversion, a horror, for the transcendental philosophy which in her view leads to mysticism and superstition. This is the carbonic gas in which she dies. For what we call poetry there is no sense in her: for in such works it is only the passionate, the oratorical, and the intellectual, that she can appreciate: yet she will endure no falsehood there, only does not always recognize the true.

"You will infer from these few words that the clearness, decidedness, and rich vivacity of her nature, cannot but affect one favourably. *One's only grievance is the altogether unprecedented glibness of her tongue*: you must make yourself all ear if you would follow her."

A month afterwards he is beginning to feel weary and satiated.

"Your exposition," he writes to Goethe, "has refreshed me and nourished me. It is highly proper that by such an act at this time, you express your contradiction of our *importunate visitress*: the case would grow intolerable else. . . . Being sick at present and gloomy, it seems to me impossible that I should ever hold

such discourses again. . . . Had she taken lesson of Jean Paul, she would not have staid so long in Weimar : let her try it for other three weeks at her peril."

Two months later he closes his notices of the lady by this merciless sarcasm :—" I have not been at all well : the weather is not kind to me ;—besides, *ever since the departure of Madame, I have felt no otherwise than as if I had risen from a severe sickness.*"

Goethe's account of her is somewhat more deliberate and patient, but very similar in the main. He writes in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*—

"The great qualities of this high-thinking and high-feeling authoress lie in the view of every one ; and the results of her journey through Germany testify sufficiently how she applied her time there. Her objects were manifold : she wished to know Weimar—to gain accurate acquaintance with its moral, social, literary aspects, and whatever else it offered ; further, however, she herself also wished to be known ; and endeavoured, therefore, to give her own views currency, no less than to search out our mode of thought. Neither could she rest satisfied even here : she must also work upon the senses, upon the feelings, upon the spirit ; must strive to awaken a certain activity or vivacity, with the want of which she reproached us.

"*Having no notion of what Duty means*, and to what a silent, collected posture he that undertakes it must restrict himself, she was evermore for striking in, for instantaneously producing an effect. In society, she required there to be constant talking and discoursing. . . .

"To philosophize in society, means to talk with vivacity about insoluble problems. This was her peculiar pleasure and passion. Naturally, too, she was wont to carry it, in such speaking and counter-speaking, up to those concerns of thought and sentiment which properly should not be spoken of, except between God and the individual. Here, moreover, as woman and Frenchwoman, she had the habit of sticking fast on main positions, and, as it were, not hearing rightly what the other said. By all these things the evil spirit was awakened in me, so that I would treat whatever

was advanced no otherwise than dialectically and problematically, and often by stiff-necked contradictions brought her to despair ; when she for the first time grew rightly amiable, and in the most brilliant manner exhibited her talent of thinking and replying.

“More than once I had regular dialogues with her, ourselves two ; in which likewise, however, she was burdensome, according to her fashion ; *never granting, on the most important topics, a moment of reflection*, but passionately demanding that we should despatch the deepest concerns, the weightiest occurrences, as lightly as if it were a game at shuttlecock.\*

Some years after her first visit to Germany, she came to England, and Sir James Mackintosh, who saw much of her, thus describes her :—

“On my return I found the whole fashionable and literary world occupied with Madame de Staël, the most celebrated woman of this or perhaps any age. . . . She treats me as the person whom she most delights to honour : I am generally ordered with her to dinner, as one orders beans and bacon ; I have, in consequence, dined with her at the houses of almost all the Cabinet Ministers. She is one of the few persons who surpass expectation ; she has every sort of talent, and would be universally popular if, in society, she were to confine herself to her inferior talents—pleasantry, anecdote, and literature—which are so much more suited to conversation than her eloquence and genius.” †

Lord Byron also saw much of her both in London in 1813 and at Diodati in 1816. In the notes to the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, he records her virtues and attractions in a piece of elaborate fine writing, fit only for a tombstone, and which would be pronounced inflated and tasteless even there. In his *Diary* and

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\* It is interesting, after reading what Schiller and Goethe thought of Madame de Stael, to read what the lady, in her turn thought of them. (See her *L'Allemagne*, part ii., ch. vii. and viii.) She was more complimentary than the gentlemen.

† *Memoirs of Mackintosh*, ii. 264.

Correspondence, however, we meet with many hasty references to her, not intended for the public eye, and therefore more likely to convey his genuine impressions. "I saw Curran presented to Madame de Staël at Mackintosh's:—it was the grand confluence of the Rhone and the Saone; they were both so damned ugly that I could not help wondering how the best intellects of France and Ireland could have taken up respectively such residences." . . . "Madame de Staël-Holstein has lost one of her young barons, who has been carbonadoed by a vile Teutonic adjutant—kilt and killed in a coffee-house at Schrawsenhausen. Corinne is, of course, what all mothers must be! but will, I venture to prophesy, do what few mothers could—write an essay upon it. She cannot exist without a grievance and somebody to see or read how much grief becomes her." . . . "To-day I dine with Mackintosh and *Mrs Stale* (as John Bull may be pleased to denominate Corinne), whom I saw last night at Covent-Garden, yawning over the humour of Falstaff." . . . "To-day (Tuesday) a very pretty billet from Madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein. She is pleased to be much pleased with my mention of her and her last work in my notes. I spoke as I thought. Her works are my delight, and so is she herself—for half-an-hour. But she is a woman by herself, and has done more intellectually than all the rest of them together;—she ought to have been a man." . . . "Asked for Wednesday to dine and meet the Staël. I don't much like it;—she always talks of *myself* or

*herself*, and I am not (except in soliloquy, as now) much enamoured of either subject—especially of one's works. What the devil shall I say about *De l'Allemagne*? I like it prodigiously; but unless I can twist my admiration into something like fantastical expression, she won't believe me; and I know by experience that I shall be overwhelmed by fine things about rhyme, &c." . . . "The Staël was at the other end of the table, and less loquacious than heretofore. We are now very good friends; though she asked Lady Melbourne whether I really had any *bonhomme*. She might as well have asked that question before she told C. L. 'c'est un démon.' True enough, but rather premature, for *she* could not have found it out." . . . When in Switzerland, he wrote: "Madame de Staël has made Coppet as agreeable as society and talent can make any place on earth." . . . "She was a good woman at heart, and the cleverest at bottom, but spoilt by a wish to be—she knew not what. In her own house she was amiable; in any other person's you wished her gone, and in her own again."

These extracts will serve to show what Madame de Staël was in miscellaneous society: in the more intimate relations of life few persons were ever more seriously or steadfastly beloved. She was an excellent hostess, and one of the most warm, constant, and zealous of friends—on the whole, an admirable, loveable, but somewhat overpowering woman. On the abdication of Napoleon she rushed back to Paris,

and remained there with few intervals till her death, filling her drawing-rooms with the brilliant society which she enjoyed so passionately, and of which she was herself the brightest ornament. But she survived the restoration of the Bourbons only a short time; her constitution had been seriously undermined by the fatigues and irritations she had undergone, and she died in July 1817, on the anniversary of the taking of the Bastille, at the age of fifty-one. Her last literary production was the "*Considérations sur la Révolution Française*," which she began with a view of vindicating her father's memory, and intended as a record of his public life.

We have no idea of attempting any criticism, or even any general description, of her various works: such a task, if executed with care and completeness, would carry us far beyond our limits—if discharged in a hasty and perfunctory manner, would be worse than unsatisfactory. The peculiar charm of her writings arises from the mixture of brilliancy and depth which they exhibit: a brilliancy which is even more than French—a profundity which is almost German. You cannot read a page without meeting with some reflection which you wish to transfer to your memory, or your common-place book.\* These reflections are not

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\* For example, we have just met with the following in her chapter "de l'amour dans le mariage" (*L'Allemagne*). "La gloire elle-même ne saurait être pour une femme qu' un deuil éclatant du bonheur." In *Corinne* we find—"Ce sont les caractères passionnés, bien plus que les caractères légers, qui sont

always sound; but they are always ingenious and suggestive. *L'Allemagne*, though incomplete and often superficial, is perhaps as nearly a true delineation of Germany as France could take in, and shows wonderful power of thought, as *Corinne* shows wonderful depth of insight and of feeling. These are the two works—*Corinne* especially—by which she will live; and both were the production of her mature years: she was thirty-eight when she wrote the latter, and forty-two when she finished the former. Yet in both there is the passionate earnestness—the vehement eloquence—the generous warmth of youth. From first to last there was nothing frivolous, artificial, or heartless in Madame de Staël: she had nothing French about her, except her untiring vivacity and her sparkling wit.\* On the contrary, a tone of the

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capables de folie.” “L’aspect de la nature enseigne la résignation, mais ne peut rien sur l’incertitude.” “Les Romains n’avoient pas cet aride principe d’utilité, qui fertilise quelques coins de terre de plus, en frappant de stérilité le vaste domaine du sentiment et de la pensée.” “La vie religieuse est un combat, et non pas un hymne.”

\* It was rather *esprit* than what we generally mean by “wit:” she was eminently *spirituel* in her conversation, but not a sayer of *bon mots*. Few of her repartees or witticisms have been recorded. One, indeed, we remember, which show how formidable she might have been in this line. An unfortunate man, finding himself seated at dinner between her and her friend Madame Recamier, could think of nothing better to open the conversation with than the *fade* compliment—“Me voici entre l’esprit et la beauté.” Now, Madame de Staël neither chose that *she* should be considered destitute of beauty nor that her friend should be considered destitute of wit: she was therefore far from flattered by the *rapprochement*, and turned round upon her smirking victim with—“Oui! et sans posséder ni l’une ni l’autre!”



profoundest melancholy runs throughout all her writings. A short time before her death she said to Chateaubriand: "Je suis ce que j'ai toujours été—vive et triste." It is in *Corinne*, especially, but also in *Delphine*, that we trace that indescribable sadness which seems inseparable from noble minds—the crown of thorns which genius must ever wear. It was not with her, as with so many, the dissipation of youthful illusions—the disenchantment of the ideal life. On the contrary, the spirit of poetry, the fancies and paintings of enthusiasm, were neither dimmed nor tarnished for her, even by the approach of death; she could dream of earthly happiness, and thirsted for it still; but she felt that she had never tasted it as she was capable of conceiving it; she had never loved as she could love and yearned to love; of all her faculties, she touchingly complained, "the only one that had been fully developed was the faculty of suffering." Surrounded by the most brilliant men of genius, beloved by a host of faithful and devoted friends, the centre of a circle of unsurpassed attractions, she was yet doomed to mourn "the solitude of life." No affection filled up her whole heart, called forth all her feelings, or satisfied her passionate longings after felicity; the full union of souls, which she could imagine so vividly and paint in such glorious colours, was denied to her—and all the rest "availed her nothing." With a mind teeming with rich and brilliant thoughts, with a heart melting with the tenderest and most passionate emotions, she had no

one—no ONE—to appreciate the first and reciprocate the last; she had to live “the inner life” *alone*; to tread the weary and dusty thoroughfares of existence, with no hand clasped in hers, no sympathizing voice to whisper strength and consolation when the path grew rough and thorny, and the lamp burnt flickering and low. Nay more, she had to “keep a stern tryste with death,”—to walk towards the Great Darkness with none to bear her company to the margin of the cold stream, to send a cheering voice over the black waters, and to give her *rendezvous* upon the further shore. What wonder then that she sometimes faltered and grew faint under the solitary burden, and “sickened at the unshared light!” The consolation offered by a poet of our own day to the sorrowing children of genius did not always suffice for her—rarely at all times can it suffice for any.

“Because the few with signal virtue crowned,  
 The heights and pinnacles of human mind,  
 Sadder and wearier than the rest are found,  
 Wish not thy soul less wise or less refined.  
 True that the small delights which every day  
 Cheer and distract the pilgrim, are not theirs;  
 True, that, tho’ free from Passion’s lawless sway,  
 A loftier being brings severer cares.  
 Yet have they special pleasures, even mirth,  
 By those undreamed of who have only trod  
 Life’s valley smooth; and if the rolling earth  
 To their nice ear have many a painful tone,  
 They know man doth not live by joy alone,  
 But by the presence of the power of God.” \*

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\* R. M. Milnes.—“Poems of many years.”

Two of the most remarkable men of France were associated with Madame de Staël both socially and historically. Both lived in her intimacy for a longer or shorter period, and both were closely connected with the great events with which she, either as an actor or a sufferer, was mixed up. Talleyrand was her intimate of the eighteenth and Benjamin Constant of the nineteenth century. They were two of the most distinctive and strongly marked characters of their day, and as such would well deserve a fuller delineation and analysis than we can afford them. Each was the type of a class and of a genius, and we question whether strict justice has yet been done to either. Talleyrand has been especially maltreated by common fame. By most who know his name, he is regarded as a second Machiavelli—as little understood and as ruthlessly slandered as the first—an intriguing and unprincipled diplomatist—a heartless *persifleur*—the very incarnation of political profligacy and shameless tergiversation. His portraits have almost all been drawn by his foes—by those whom he had baffled, or by those whom he had deserted; by those whom his pungent sarcasms had wounded, or whom his superior address had mortified; and his own memoirs, from his own hand, are to remain a sealed book till, by the death of every one whom they could compromise (or, say his enemies, who could contradict them), they have become interesting to the historian alone. Talleyrand was something very different from the popular concep-

tion of him.\* He was a profound thinker; he had strong political opinions, if he had no moral principles; he was at least as bold, daring, and decided in action as he was sagacious in council; his political and social tact—which is wisdom so quick and piercing as to seem unreasoning—had the promptitude and certainty of an instinct; and living in constant intercourse, hostile or friendly, with the ablest men of that stirring epoch, he acquired an undisputed ascendancy over them all, by the simple influence of a keener intellect and a subtler tongue.

Far from being devoid of political predilections and convictions, his whole career, from the time he entered the States-general, showed that both were very strong in him. He had thought deeply and he felt keenly. That much of personal feeling entered into the motives which determined him to the course he took, and that much of egotism and scorn of his fellow-men mingled with and alloyed his lofty and persevering ambition, cannot be denied, and is not to be wondered at. We must read his character and career by the light which his early history throws over it, and we shall find there enough amply to explain both his steady preference for constitutional liberty after the English model, and the ardour and determination with which he threw himself into the most active ranks of the revolutionists.

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\* To guard myself against the possible imputation of having borrowed from the recent work of Sir Henry Bulwer, I may mention that this sketch of Talleyrand was originally printed twenty years ago.

He had suffered too much under the old *régime* not to desire to sweep away a system which permitted such injustices as he had endured. He had seen too thoroughly the hollowness and rottenness of everything around him—the imbecile feebleness of the Court, the greediness and impiety of the Church, the selfish and heartless profligacy of the higher ranks—to be of opinion that there was much worth preserving in the existing state of things. He had too fine a fancy and too powerful a mind not to participate in some measure in the hopes, then entertained by all the more “erected spirits” of the nation, of an era of glorious social regeneration. He was a bishop against his will ; he had lived in the very centre of all the elegant immoralities of Paris ; and he had studied and conversed with Voltaire. He was the eldest son of one of the noblest families of France, but having been lamed by an accident arising from the combined neglect of parents and menials, he was compelled, by one of those acts of family tyranny then by no means uncommon, to forego his birthright, and accept the destiny of younger sons in that age and of that rank, —*viz.*, to go into the Church. Without being allowed to return to the paternal roof, he was transferred from his nurse’s cottage to the ecclesiastical seminary of St Sulpice, and thence to the College of the Sorbonne. He was made a priest without the slightest attention either to his wishes or his character. Boiling over with youthful passions, with healthy energy, with splendid talents, with mundane tastes, he was con-

demned by an act of flagrant injustice to a life of celibacy, of inaction, and of religious duties which, in the case of one so devoid of devotional sentiment as he was, could only be the most loathsome and wearisome hypocrisy. What wonder that a mighty wrong like this should have sunk into his mind, and greatly modified his views and feelings, even if it did not sour his temper? At College he brooded over his mortification, looked his destiny in the face, and deliberately took his course. With rare powers like his, he felt that obscurity was impossible, but that he must rise by a different ladder from the one he would himself have chosen. He resolved to triumph over those who had degraded him, but to whom he knew himself in every way superior; and he prepared himself to do so by sedulous and earnest study. He spoke little, he reflected much. Naturally both intelligent and ardent, he taught himself to become well-informed, reserved, and self-restrained; and from the training which the Catholic Church has in store for its best servants, he learned that untiring and watchful patience, that deep insight into men, that quick appreciation of circumstances, those gentle and insinuating manners, that habitual quietude, that prompt and well-timed activity, which were his most distinguishing qualities through life, and his chief instruments of success. When he had completed his theological studies he entered the world—to enjoy it and subdue it. He was known as the Abbé de Perigord. “*Contrarié dans les goûts* (says Mignet), *il y entra en mécontent, prêt à y agir*

en révolutionnaire. Il y obtint, dès l'abord, la réputation d'un homme avec lequel il fallait compter, et qui, ayant un beau nom, un grand calme, infiniment d'esprit, quelque chose de gracieux qui captivait, de malicieux qui effrayait,\* beaucoup d'ardeur contenue par une prudence suffisante et conduite par une extrême adresse, devait nécessairement réussir."

He soon became agent-general for the clergy—an office of great influence and importance—and subsequently bishop of Autun, and when the States-General met, he was elected as deputy from his diocese. He was now thirty-five years of age. He at once embraced the popular side, and became prominent and powerful. His voice was raised in favour both of liberty of thought and of equality of civil rights. He supported the union of the three orders—the first great step of the revolution; he persuaded the Assembly to decide against those *mandats impératifs*, which would have made its members the mere slaves and

\* Talleyrand, at his first entrance into society, armed himself with that fine and subtle wit which has made him so renowned, and by one or two crushing repartees made himself both respected and feared. But in general at this period his sayings were distinguished rather for *finesse* than severity. He was in the salon of the Duc de Choiseul when the Duchess De N—— was announced. She was a lady whose adventures were then the talk of all Paris, and an exclamation of oh! oh! escaped the Abbé, so loud that the Duchess who entered at that moment heard it. As soon as the company were seated round the table, the lady said, "Je voudrais bien savoir, M. l'Abbé, pourquoi vous avez dit oh! oh! lorsque je suis entrée?" "Point, Madame (replied the Abbé), vous avez mal entendu. J'ai dit ah! ah!"

mouthpieces of their constituents; he was one of eight who were selected to prepare the New Constitution which was to regenerate the country; he was appointed to report upon a system of National Education, and the memoir which he presented to the Assembly not only obtained an instant and vast celebrity, but formed the foundation of the plan then adopted, and which exists with little change to the present day. Besides these labours he paid special attention to the finances, which were then in a most deplorable condition; he supported the proposals of Necker; and it was on his motion that the Assembly resolved on the seizure and sale of all ecclesiastical property as belonging to the State, and on the reduction of the clergy from the position of independent proprietors to that of salaried employés. In doing this he proposed to improve the condition of the inferior clergy, while he hoped at the same time to avert a national bankruptcy. At the same time he supported the equalisation of imposts, and the entire suppression of all feudal and seignorial rights. Finally, he was appointed by his colleagues to draw up an address to the nation explaining and justifying the proceedings of the Assembly, and so admirably did he discharge this function, that he was shortly afterwards elected President by a large majority.

What might have been his course during the subsequent and more stormy phases of the Revolution we cannot pretend to conjecture. Happily for him he was saved from having to take a part in scenes where almost any part would have been questionable, objection-



able, and unsafe. He had resigned, or rather abjured, his clerical functions, and early in 1792 was sent to England on a diplomatic mission, the object of which was to substitute a *national* for a *court* alliance. Thirty-eight years afterwards, at the age of seventy-six, he was again accredited to the same country on a similar errand. His first and last diplomatic acts at least were consistent and in unison. He remained in England (with the exception of a short visit to Paris) till the following year, when Robespierre proscribed him, and shortly afterwards Mr Pitt ordered him to quit the country in twenty-four hours. His residence here, chiefly in the society of Madame de Staël, increased his admiration for our institutions, but he was ill-received in the higher circles—being regarded partly as an apostate priest, partly a reputed profligate, partly as an intriguing revolutionist. But those who knew him at this period describe him as one of the most fascinating of companions, quiet, gentle, caressing, and attentive—speaking little, but when he did speak, compressing volumes into a single phrase. Champfort relates, that when Rhulhière observed, “Je ne sais pourquoi j’ai la réputation d’être méchant : je n’ai fait qu’une méchanceté dans ma vie,” Talleyrand, who had taken no part in the conversation, and sat at a distant corner of the room, asked, with deliberate significance, “Et quand finira-t-elle ?” On another occasion, when relating some atrocity of one of his colleagues, his auditor remarked, “Mais l’homme qui a pu commettre une pareille action est capable d’assassiner.” “D’as-

sassinier, non . . . (said Talleyrand reflectively) . . . d'empoisonner, oui." \*

Proscribed in France, and banished from England, M. de Talleyrand went to America, and, as a Memoir which he afterwards read before the National Institute testifies, did not waste his time while there. But when a better day began to dawn after the overthrow of the Reign of Terror, Chénier, at the instigation of Madame de Staël, procured a decree of the Convention, erasing his name from the list of emigrants and permitting his return. He re-entered France, and after a short interval was made Minister of Foreign Affairs under the Directory; but as they became more and more imbecile, and a change more and more inevitable and desirable, he was, or contrived to be, dismissed in the early part of 1799; and thus found himself at liberty to assist Buonaparte in his revolution of the 18th Brumaire, which it is difficult not to regard as, under the circumstances, the greatest service he ever rendered to his country. Madame de Staël never forgave his adhesion to the popular young hero. † But Talleyrand saw that France was perish-

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\* A friend having spoken of Sièyes as "un homme profond,"—"Profond . . . ce n'est pas le mot (said Talleyrand); c'est creux, très creux, que vous voulez dire."

† When "Delphine" appeared, Madame de Staël was currently reported to have drawn both herself and M. de Talleyrand therein—herself as Delphine, him as Madame de Vernon. Talleyrand met her shortly afterwards, and paid her the usual compliments on the performance, adding, in his gentlest and sweetest voice, the keen sarcasm, "On m'assure que nous y sommes tous les deux, vous et moi, *déguisés en femmes.*"

ing for want of a government; that her political notabilities were neither honest enough, wise enough, nor able enough to rescue and regenerate her; disorder in the finances, disorganisation in the interior, and disaster abroad, all clamoured loudly for a change; and in the vigorous intellect, gigantic sagacity, and iron will of the young conqueror of Italy, Talleyrand, like most Frenchmen, recognised the Man for the crisis — *l'homme nécessaire*, as Necker termed him. The mode in which the Directory and its councils were overthrown was audacious and violent enough; but the result went far to justify the actors. Order at home and victory abroad followed in quick succession; the finances were restored; confidence was re-awakened; the funds rose;\* an admirable system of administration was established; France was at once *reconstituted*, after ten years of misery, crime, and chaos; and the period from 1800 to 1807, during which Talleyrand was the principal minister, was beyond example the most glorious in her annals. It is true that much of the work of Talleyrand's earlier years was upset: much, however, remained indestructible. It is true that under

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\* An enemy of Talleyrand having hinted to Buonaparte that the ex-abbé had become very rich, and probably by no very creditable means, the First Consul took him to task in his usual rude and brusque manner. "On m'assure que vous êtes très riche, citoyen; comment cela se peut-il?" "Rien de plus simple (replied the ready-witted and imperturbable courtier); j'ai acheté les rentes *la veille* du dix-huit Brumaire, et je les ai révendus *le lendemain*." Could there be a more effective silencer, or a more delicate and subtle compliment? Buonaparte had not another word to say.

Napoleon France enjoyed only the shadow of those Parliamentary institutions to which Talleyrand was sincerely attached, and which formed part of the original constitution urged upon and adopted by the First Consul; but probably by this time the experienced Minister had begun to feel that at that crisis a man was more important than an institution—which, it must be allowed, had not been attended with any brilliant success. It is true that during his period of office Talleyrand had to sanction and transact many acts of injustice and oppression to foreign nations, and to witness much tyranny at home; but he probably satisfied himself with reflecting that he was serving his chief and aggrandising his country. He quitted office after the Peace of Tilsit, when France was at her culminating point. He set his face steadily against the Emperor's subsequent aggressions. He condemned the invasion of Spain so severely, that Napoleon, in deep indignation, deprived him of his dignity at court as Grand Chamberlain. His deep and far-seeing sagacity probably perceived that the ambition of the Emperor had blinded and impaired his genius, and that he had embarked in a course which must lead to ultimate reaction and ruin. In all likelihood this ruin was greatly hastened by his retirement from the direction of affairs, for his coolness, patience, and wisdom had often tempered the hastiness and impetuosity of Napoleon. "Le grand esprit de Napoléon et le bon sens de M. de Talleyrand (says Mignet) semblaient faits l'un pour l'autre. Ce qu'il y avait d'inventif de fécond,

de hardi, d'impétueux, dans le premier, avait besoin de ce qu'il y avait de net, de froid, d'avisé, de sûr, dans le second. L'un avait le génie de l'action, l'autre celui du conseil. L'un projetait tout ce qu'il y avait de grand, l'autre évitait tout ce qu'il y avait de dangereux ; et la fougue créatrice de l'un pouvait être heureusement tempérée par la lenteur circonspecte de l'autre. M. de Talleyrand savait faire perdre du temps à l'empereur lorsque sa colère ou sa passion l'auraient poussé à des mesures précipitées, et lui donnait le moyen de se montrer plus habile en devenant plus calme. Aussi, disait-il, avec une exagération spirituelle dans la forme, mais non sans vérité : ' L'Empereur a été compromis le jour où il a pu faire un quart d'heure plus tôt ce que j'obtenais qu'il fit un quart d'heure plus tard.'\* La perte d'un pareil conseiller dut être un malheur pour lui, en attendant qu'elle devint un danger." †

Napoleon never forgave Talleyrand his condemna-

\* It is interesting to see how closely this account tallies with that given by M. Thiers in his *Consulat et l'Empire*. "Toutefois, il avait un mérite moral, c'était d'aimer la paix sous un maître qui aimait la guerre ; et de le laisser voir. Doué d'un goût exquis, d'un tact sûr, même d'une paresse utile, il pouvait rendre de véritables services, seulement en opposant à l'abondance de parole, de plume, et d'action du Premier Consul, sa sobriété, sa parfaite mesure, son penchant même à ne rien faire."

† No government which disgraced Talleyrand, or was deserted by him, ever prospered long after his retirement. "Sire (said he once by way of explanation of the fact to Louis XVIII.), Il y a quelque chose inexplicable en moi qui porte malheur aux gouvernemens qui me négligent."

tion of the Spanish invasion. He hated him, as he hated all who opposed his will or criticised his measures; but at the same time he knew him too well not to fear him. He suspected his designs and dreaded his intrigues; but he dared not take any decided steps against him, and Talleyrand was far too wary to give him any excuse. Under the irritating influence of these feelings, the Emperor lost no opportunity of menacing and insulting the retired minister, often in the vulgarest and rudest manner. Some of these sallies Talleyrand endured with the imperturbable and impassive manner which distinguished him, some he retorted with spirit and success.\* But those who read the account of the scenes which passed between these *amis d'autrefois* will find little reason either for

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\* When the Spanish princes were brought to France, they were consigned to the charge of M. de Talleyrand, who was obliged to be their host at his country-house. It was rumoured that one of them employed his forced leisure in seducing Madame de T. It is said, we know not with what truth, that Napoleon had the brutality to venture on some insulting allusion to this rumour, in conversation with Talleyrand himself. The Grand Chamberlain replied with his usual immovable calmness, "Il est vrai, Sire, qu'il eût été mieux *et pour l'honneur de votre Majesté et pour le mien* qu'il ne fût jamais question de ces Princes d'Espagne." Whether this be true or not, the following unquestionably is: When Talleyrand appeared at the Emperor's *levée* after the battle of Leipsig, the latter accosted him with his usual *brusquerie*, accused him of caballing against him, and overwhelmed him with the most vehement reproaches, ending by saying, "Mais, prenez garde, si j'étais malade dangereusement, je vous avertis, vous seriez mort avant moi." "Sire (answered the courtier, with the most polite smile), je n'avais pas besoin d'un pareil avertissement pour adresser au ciel des vœux biens ardents pour la conservation des jours de votre Majesté."

wonder or for blame, if the ex-minister's patriotic desire for the termination of Napoleon's reign was heightened by something of personal animosity. Be this as it may, Talleyrand remained in a state of watchful inaction till the Allies approached Paris in 1814, when it became evident that Napoleon's career was ended, and that all a good citizen could do was to make the best terms he could for his country, both with the enemies who had conquered her, and with the sovereign who was to mount upon her throne. This task Talleyrand undertook with unusual vivacity and energy. After the capitulation, he saved France from much misery, and possibly from a civil war, by his resolute opposition to any *mezzo-termine*, such as a regency and the proclamation of Napoleon's son, or of Bernadotte, as once was proposed. "Non (said he to Alexander, who had a lingering admiration for Napoleon, which made him unwilling utterly to destroy him), Non, Sire, il n'y a que deux choses possibles—Buonaparte ou Louis XVIII. Buonaparte est un prince : Louis XVIII. est un prince—tout ce qui n'est ni l'un et l'autre n'est qu'un intrigue." He, therefore, supported with all his influence the restoration of the Bourbons ; but, cognizant of their incurable character, and faithful to his old political ideas, he insisted upon the promulgation of "the Charter," which established a constitutional monarchy and two Chambers. The basis of the institutions which governed France from 1814 to 1830, she owed to Talleyrand.

His next task was a far more difficult one. It was to act as minister for the foreign affairs of a conquered country, and in a camp of conquerors met to decide upon her limits and her fate. His genius was never so manifest as at the Congress of Vienna. He had to deal with sovereigns burning to avenge spoliation and humiliations which no doubt might justify the severest retaliation, and furious at the sufferings and maltreatments they had undergone; he had to persuade them to turn their vengeance against Napoleon, not against France. They had met to despoil and deal with her at their free pleasure; he had to induce them to admit her as one of the high contracting powers. He succeeded, chiefly through his influence with Alexander, in obtaining a seat at their councils, and once there, his supreme ability soon gave him an irresistible ascendant: he succeeded in sowing dissension between the Allies, and at last in persuading them that it would be a bad and shallow policy to weaken France too much. But in the meantime Louis XVIII., freed from the counsels of his wise minister,\* whose superi-

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\* "Déjà de Vienne il avait écrit à Louis XVIII. toutes les fautes qu'on reprochait à son gouvernement en 1814: l'abandon de la cocarde tricolore; les restrictions apportées aux garanties établies par la Charte; l'éloignement dans lequel le parti constitutionnel avait été tenu des emplois publics, presque uniquement accordés à d'anciens royalistes; l'ignorance et la maladresse avec laquelle on avait donné la France à régir à des hommes nourris dans l'émigration, étrangers aux idées et aux sentimens de la nation nouvelle, qui avaient alarmé ses intérêts et soulevé ses haines; et l'absence d'un ministère homogène, formant un conseil responsable, dirigé par un président, et capable de gouverner."—*Mignet—Notice Historique.*



ority annoyed and eclipsed him, had committed folly after folly, had disgusted the army, and alienated the returning affections of the people. Napoleon had landed from Elba, and was again upon the throne, while Louis was a fugitive at Ghent. The Allies had to commence a new war, and the crowning victory of Waterloo, and the surrender of Napoleon, placed France more completely at their mercy than before. Their indignation was, of course, more vehement than ever, and the task of Talleyrand in appeasing them, incomparably more difficult; and finding his efforts of no avail, either to control the irritated monarch or pacify his furious allies, he quitted office to avoid signing the humiliating treaty of 1815. Before doing so, however, he had persuaded Louis XVIII. to issue the Proclamation of Cambrai, promising a more faithful adherence to, and a more liberal interpretation of, the Charter, and greater deference to those notions of liberty which the revolution of 1789 had indelibly rooted in the minds of the people. He had the utmost difficulty in persuading the incurable old Bourbon that the permanence of his throne depended on his management of the democratic spirit, and that the adoption of the policy of the Legitimists would be fatal to him. The king became anxious to get rid of his importunate councillor, and by way of hinting to him the propriety of retiring, he asked him one day, how far it was to Valençay, the country seat of M. de Talleyrand. "Je ne sais pas au juste, Sire (replied the minister), mais il doit avoir environ le

double du distance d'ici à Gand ;"—intimating that before he, Talleyrand, could reach Valençay, Louis, deprived of the safeguard of his counsel, would be again an exile.

From the time of his retirement he took his place in the ranks of the Liberal opposition in the Chamber of Peers, and steadily set his face against the oppression and reactionary follies of the Restoration. In 1830 what he had long foreseen took place: a new revolution, patiently toiled for during fifteen years of selfishness and blunders, drove the Bourbons definitively into exile, and summoned the veteran diplomatist into public life once more. He gave Louis Philippe the benefit of his multifarious experience, and accepted the embassy to England, with the view of cementing that alliance between the two countries which had been the earliest object of his official life. That done, he once more retired into privacy; and died at the age of eighty-four, with faculties and cheerfulness alike unimpaired—though no man had lived through scenes more calculated to crush the one and exhaust the other.

The great crime against political morality with which he is reproached—his inconstancy—seemed at all times to lie very lightly on his conscience. He spoke of his changes without the smallest embarrassment or shame, alleging that what he served was not this or that Government, but his Country, under the political form which it had put on for the time being; that he was faithful to each Administration so long as

it suited France, and wisely and honestly consulted her interests ; and that he never deserted any till it had become the duty of every good citizen to do so. He has also been severely reproached with avarice and corruption, and probably the charge was not without foundation ; but there is no reason to believe that he ever betrayed or sold his country or his employers for his own private interests ; and at a period when it was customary and almost an avowed transaction for ministers to receive vast presents, called *pots-de-vin*, from powers or parties whom they had been able to gratify and serve, we can scarcely judge a man according to the purer delicacy and severer standard of to-day. This much is certain—that, surrounded with enemies and beset with dangers at every period of his public life, he was never known to counsel a violence or to be guilty of a vengeance ; he punished his adversaries by *bon-mots* alone ; he was in all things a moderator and a friend of peace ; and in private life he was gentle, amiable, and singularly beloved by all who were admitted to his intimacy. The character of his intellect was in many respects Italian rather than French ; and to find his parallel we must go back to the statesmen who ruled Florence and Milan during the Middle Ages. His subtlety and *finesse* belonged to both countries : his patience, his quietness, his imperturbable sweetness of temper, were exclusively Italian ; while there was something almost feminine in the seductive attractiveness of his manner. On the whole, if we consider the moral atmosphere in which

he was born and bred, the false position in which early injustice had placed him, the fearful times in which he lived and acted—times eminently fatal to all high enthusiasm, to all fixed opinions, to all inflexible constancy—times which tried the courage of the bravest, the convictions of the most obstinate, the faith of the most earnest—we shall be disposed to judge him with unwonted indulgence, and may perhaps be justified in pronouncing him as worthy of esteem and admiration as any public man can be who lays claim to no lofty sentiment, no stern principles, and no spirit of self-denial or self-sacrifice.

Of Benjamin Constant, the friend and ally of Madame de Staël for upwards of twenty years, we have left ourselves little space to speak; and in truth his was a type of character with which, though well worth studying, we can feel little sympathy. He was a second Voltaire, almost as clever as the first, even more selfish and egotistical, and with none of his redeeming benevolence and sincerity. By universal consent he was, among men, the most brilliant converser of his age. All his contemporaries speak of his *esprit* as something perfectly wonderful and enchanting. In the tribune he was formidable from his wit and pungency. As a writer he was acute, sparkling, and subtle. His letters are models of grace and *finesse*—as heartless and affected as those of Walpole, but incomparably cleverer and more entertaining. But he was spoilt and *blasé* at a very early age—“used up” before most young men have even

begun to taste the enjoyments of life. At the age of three-and-twenty his whole soul was withered and dried up : \* he had tried everything, and thrown everything aside ; he had analysed everything, and found everything hollow and deceptive ; he had exhausted the pleasures and interests of the world, and pronounced them all to be “weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.” He had “travelled from Dan to Beersheba, and found all barren.” His heart had become as arid as the desert sand ; he was a *persifleur* to the very core ; profoundly cynical and profoundly sceptical, he loved nothing and believed in nothing ; † and a deep and paralyzing conviction of the brevity and worthlessness of life had desolated all feeling and destroyed all energy. He was one of the most hopeless of characters—an intellectual and self-observing

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\* In one of his letters to Madame de Charrière he thus describes himself in 1792 :—“Blasé sur tout, ennuyé de tout, amer, égoïste, avec une sorte de sensibilité qui ne sert qu'à me tourmenter, mobile au point de passer pour fol, sujet à des accès de mélancolie qui interrompent tous mes plans, et me font agir, pendant qu'ils durent, comme si j'avois renoncé à tout. . . . Comment voulez-vous que je réussisse, que je plaise, que je vive ?”

† The work of Constant, “De la Religion,” which occupied him at intervals for thirty years, is the only one of magnitude he has left behind him ; and it is characteristic of the man that the first portion and outline of it was written on the backs of packs of playing cards. After his strange piece of political inconsistency (joining Buonaparte during “the Hundred Days”), he wrote an exculpation of himself to Louis XVIII., which was favourably received, and he was pardoned. A friend complimented him on the occasion : “Eh bien, votre memoire a réussi ; elle a persuadé le Roi.” “Je ne m'étonne pas (replied Constant) ; elle m'a presque persuadé moi-même !”

libertine. He had drank at every fountain, whether of refined or illicit pleasure; *and he had analyzed each sensation as he went along.* No deep affection—no absorbing passion—no earnest or solemn thought—seems ever to have entered his heart; he was dissolute *en philosophe*; and, as the poet says,—

“Where such fairies once have danced,  
No grass will ever grow.”

In 1790—in the midst of the heart-stirring events which were then agitating his own country, and exciting the attention of the whole civilized world—he writes thus to the fatal friend, Madame de Charrière, whose conversation and intimacy had so greatly contributed to wither up his young spirit:—

“Plus on y pense, et plus on est *at a loss* de chercher le *cui bono* de cette sottise qu'on appelle le monde. Je ne comprends ni le but, ni l'architecte, ni le peintre, ni les figures de cette lanterne magique dont j'ai l'honneur de faire partie. Le comprendrai-je mieux quand j'aurai disparu de dessus le sphère étroite et obscure dans laquelle il plait à je ne sais quel invisible pouvoir de me faire danser, bon gré, mal gré? C'est ce que j'ignore. . . . Thomson, l'auteur des *Saisons*, passait souvent des jours entiers dans son lit, et quand on lui demandait pourquoi il ne se levait pas: '*I see no motive to rise, man,*' répondait-il. Ni moi non plus, je ne vois de motifs pour rien dans ce monde, et je n'ai de goût pour rien.”

Six months later he writes again:—

“Ce n'est pas comme me trouvant dans des circonstances affligeantes que je me plains de la vie: je suis parvenu à ce point de désabusement *que je ne saurais que désirer* si tout dépendait de moi, et que je suis convaincu que je ne serais dans aucune situation plus heureux que je ne le suis. Cette conviction et le sentiment profond et constant de la brièveté de la vie me fait tomber le livre ou la plume des mains, toutes les fois que j'étudie. Nous n'avons plus

de motifs pour acquérir de la gloire, pour conquérir un empire ou pour faire un bon livre, que nous n'en avons pour faire une promenade ou une partie de whist." . . .

He was in this deplorable state of mind—the disenchanted man of pleasure, the unbelieving epicurean, the subtle analyst of himself—when he first (in 1794) met Madame de Staël in Switzerland. The effect she produced upon him was instantaneous and lasting; and she would have cured him of his cynicism and *Voltairisme*, if the malady had not been too deep-seated for radical recovery. She made him at once almost earnest and enthusiastic. For the first time we find in his letters a tone of seriousness and a capacity of admiration. He speaks of her thus to his old friend :—

“ Je la crois très active, très imprudente, très parlante, mais bonne, confiante, et se livrant de bonne foi. Une preuve qu'elle n'est pas uniquement une machine parlante, c'est le vif intérêt qu'elle prend à tous ceux qu'elle a connus et qui souffrent.”

And a few days afterwards he says :—

“ Depuis que je la connais mieux, je trouve une grande difficulté à ne pas me répandre sans cesse en éloges, et à ne pas donner à tous ceux à qui je parle le spectacle de mon intérêt et de mon admiration. J'ai rarement vu une réunion pareille de qualités étonnantes et attrayantes, autant de brillant et de justesse, une bienveillance aussi expansive et aussi cultivée, autant de générosité, une politesse aussi douce et aussi soutenue dans le monde, tant de charme, de simplicité, d'abandon dans la société intime. C'est la seconde femme que j'ai trouvée qui m'aurait pu tenir lieu de tout l'univers, qui aurait pu être un monde à elle seule pour moi : vous savez quelle a été la première. Madame de Staël a infiniment plus d'esprit dans la conversation intime que dans le monde ; elle sait parfaitement écouter, ce que ni vous ni moi ne pensions ; elle sent l'esprit des autres avec autant de plaisir que le sien ; elle fait

valoir ceux qu'elle aime avec un attention ingénieuse et constante, qui prouve autant de bonté que d'esprit. Enfin, c'est un être à part, un être supérieur tel qu'il s'en rencontre peut-être un par siècle, et tel que ceux qui l'approchent, le connaissent et sont ces amis, doivent ne pas exiger d'autre bonheur."

Benjamin Constant was faithful through life to his early admiration for this remarkable woman: he lived much with her both at Paris and at Coppet; he accompanied her to Germany; and was henceforth one of the greatest ornaments of her brilliant circle. Of the life they led at Coppet, the following delicious picture is given by Sainte-Beuve:—

"Les conversations philosophiques, littéraires, toujours piquantes ou élevées, s'engageaient vers onze heures du matin, à la réunion du déjeuner; on les résumait au dîner, dans l'intervalle du dîner au souper, lequel avait lieu à onze heures du soir, et encore au-delà souvent jusqu'après minuit. Benjamin Constant et Madame de Staël y tenaient surtout le dé. C'est là que Benjamin Constant, que, plus jeune, nous n'avons guère vu que blasé, sortant de sa raillerie trop invétérée par un enthousiasme un peu factice, causeur toujours prodigieusement spirituel, mais chez qui l'esprit, à la fin, avait hérité de toutes les autres facultés et passions plus puissantes, c'est là qu'il se montrait avec feu et naturellement ce que Madame de Staël le proclamait sans prévention, *le premier esprit du monde*: il était certes le plus grand des hommes distingués. Leurs esprits du moins, à tous les deux, se convenaient toujours; ils étaient surs de s'entendre par là. Rien, au dire des témoins, n'était éblouissant et supérieur comme leur conversation engagée dans ce cercle choisi, eux deux tenant la raquette magique du discours, et se renvoyant, durant des heures, sans manquer jamais, le volant de mille pensées entre-croisées."

Under the influence of Madame de Staël's enthusiasm, Benjamin Constant entered the career of politics, and soon distinguished himself as liberal in opinions and *frondeur* by temper. But though always



eminent, he was never powerful. An unrivalled converser, an eloquent orator, a brilliant and most interesting writer, he yet could never attain a position of real influence or high consideration, and accomplished less than many men of far inferior capacity. Why was this? It was simply that all the display of his consummate intellect was an unreal show; his heart was dust and ashes; his character was a shifting sand. He had no strong convictions, no settled principles, no earnest purpose. He was a liberal politician, who neither esteemed nor loved his fellow-men—a student and professor of religion, who yet held no creed and could attain to no faith—a man who had skimmed the surface of every emotion, but never penetrated to the depth or the dignity of a passion. A mocking spirit presided over his whole being; to him there was nothing reverend; for him there was nothing sacred. He had early profaned the Temple of the Lord, and the *mens divinator* fled from the desecrated shrine, and left it empty, desolate, and unclean.

## BRITISH AND FOREIGN CHARACTERISTICS.

*Une Philosophe sous les toits*, by M. Emile Souvestre, is one of the pleasantest and prettiest little books that has ever fallen into our hands. It is the more interesting and surprising as having issued from the press of Paris; and, after the vehement, diseased, and bacchanalian pages of Balzac, Eugène Sue, and Victor Hugo, is medicine to our scandalised morality, balm to our wounded sensibility, rest to the wearied fancy, and positive refreshment to the irritated eye. To come to it after such reading is like the "crystalline fount" after the "feculent flood,"—like the "pure breezes of morn" after the heated and morbid atmosphere of the hospital or the gaming-house,—like the green fields and fresh vegetation of the country and the spring, after the glare and fumes of a gaudy and gas-lighted theatre. We feel that we have escaped from intoxication to sobriety, from the vortex of passion to the peace of nature, from that which is simply noxious or revolting, to that which gives true pleasure and does real good.

We rejoice to see that such a book can come out of the heart of France,—that such pictures can still be relished there,—that such a life as is here depicted can still be led there. For though the tone of the

book is pure, and all its sentiments are humane, genial, and gentle, it is as remote as possible from anything mawkish or maudlin. It has nothing of the pastoral tenderness, the overdone Arcadianism, which made the popularity of the romance of Bernardin de St Pierre nearly as sure a sign of an unhealthy state of the public mind as the licentious novels that appeared at the same time, and divided with it the favour of the reading world of France. Nor has it any closer similarity to the Swiss love-stories, and pictures and praises of savage life, with which Rousseau dazzled and delighted the fancy of the profligate and sophisticated dames of Paris, in the heinous days of Louis XV. Its pathos is all natural; its sentiments are all genuine and unforced,—the reflections of a contented and kind-hearted man who philosophizes from his garret on the motley world beneath him, and mingles with it in his own humble sphere. It indicates that there is still a portion of the heart of France sound and unperverted; and what is more to our immediate purpose, it gives a very interesting glimpse into some of those points of Continental life and character, in which it has a marked superiority to our own,—peculiarities which it would be well if we could transplant, and which incline us to a certain uncomfortable misgiving that some of our aims and exertions may be sadly misdirected, and that we may, oftener than we deem, be sailing on a wrong tack.

The book is in the form of fragments from the diary of a man of fair education and of very humble

fortunes, such as may be found in numbers, not only in Paris, but all over the Continent, who lives solitary and contented in his garret, supporting himself in tolerable comfort on the meagre salary of a subordinate Government *employé*, content with poverty while secure against indigence, watching the world around him with a cheerful and sympathizing smile, and enjoying the good things of life rather by contemplation than by actual participation. Unambitious and unstriving, too wise to risk that scanty stipend which moderate desires and skilful management have made into a competence for vaster but more precarious gains, he finds that everything conspires to teach him the same lesson,—viz., in how small an apartment happiness may dwell, and how cheaply that apartment may be furnished. Observation, ever on the alert, preserves him alike from envy or repining: he sees from his attic window the luxurious furniture of one opposite neighbour, an actress or singer, seized for debt, and her chamber rudely dismantled; and the humble but always neat room of another *vis-à-vis*, a sempstress, secure in its plodding and unaspiring poverty. He returns from a homely supper,—the one festal banquet of the year,—shared with a family yet poorer than himself, and remembers that he left the unrefined but joyous circle with the regretful exclamation, *Déjà!* and he meets the opulent lady who occupies the first floor of the house next his own, returning jaded and *ennuyée* from those gilded saloons where no joy is, and getting out of her carriage with

the yawning ejaculation, "*Enfin !*" On New-year's day, when it is customary in France, and indeed throughout the Continent, to visit friends and give or receive presents, our philosopher, who had no friends, and was too poor to make presents, was sitting somewhat moodily in his garret, for his fire would not light, the day was rainy and the wood was damp, there was no milk left for breakfast, and the pot of sweetmeat was quite empty. There is a knock at the door, and Paulette enters,—a pale, thin, ill-dressed little girl, whose life he had saved in a crowd two years before.

"Il y a deux ans de cela ; depuis, je n'avais revu la petite qu'à de longs intervalles, et je l'avais presque oubliée ; mais Paulette a la mémoire des bons cœurs ; elle vient au renouvellement de l'année m'offrir ses souhaits de bonheur. Elle m'apporte en outre, un plant de violettes en fleurs ; elle-même l'a mis en terre et cultivé ; c'est un bien qui lui appartient tout entier, car il a été conquis par ses soins, sa volonté, et sa patience. Ce présent inattendu, la rougeur modeste de la petite fille et son compliment balbutié dissipent, comme un rayon du soleil, l'espèce de brouillard qui m'enveloppait le cœur ; mes idées passent brusquement des teintes plombées du soir aux teintes les plus roses de l'aurore. Je fais asseoir Paulette, et je l'interroge gaiement.

"La petite répond d'abord par des monosyllabes, mais bientôt les rôles sont renversés, et c'est moi qui entrecoupe de courtes interjections ses longues confidences. La pauvre enfant mène une vie difficile. Orpheline depuis longtemps, elle est restée, avec son frère et sa sœur, à la charge d'une vieille grandmère qui les a élevés de misère, comme elle a coutume de le dire. Cependant Paulette l'aide maintenant dans la confection des cartonnages, sa petite sœur Perrine commence à coudre, et Henri est apprenti dans une imprimerie. Tout irait bien, sans les pertes et sans les chômages, sans les habits qui s'usent, sans les appetits qui grandissent, sans l'hiver qui oblige à acheter son soleil ! Paulette se plaint de ce que la chandelle dure trop peu et de ce que le bois coûte trop cher. La cheminée de leur mansarde est si grande qu'une falourde

y produit l'effet d'une allumette ; elle est si près du toit que le vent y renvoie la pluie, et qu'on y gèle sur lâtre en hiver ; aussi y ont ils renoncé. Tout se borne désormais à un réchaud de terre sur lequel cuit le repas. La grand'-mère avait bien parlé d'un poêle marchandé chez le revendeur du rez-de-chaussée ; mais celui-ci en a voulu sept francs, et les temps sont trop difficiles pour une pareille dépense ; la famille s'est en conséquence résignée à avoir froid par économie."

The philosopher resolves to gratify his feelings by making this poor family a New-year's present of their coveted stove. Accordingly he gets an old one of his own repaired and put up in their room while all are absent at their daily work, and takes them besides a basket of wood out of his own winter provision, observing that the sacrifice will only oblige him to warm himself by walking, or by going to bed earlier than usual.

The above extract may serve as a specimen of this little volume, and may explain wherein lies its charm. There is nothing remarkable in the events it relates, nothing brilliant in the pictures which it draws ; but an air of cheerful and healthy serenity broods over every page, and bespeaks a mind that has penetrated the true secret of life, and harvested its richest wisdom. Probably, however, the real cause of the pleasure which the book is calculated to convey arises from the contrast between its atmosphere of *repose*, and the feverish and busy world in which we live, and from the somewhat pregnant philosophical reflections which its perusal irresistibly suggests. It depicts the best and pleasantest features of Continental life, and makes us pause a while in our breathless and unceasing race,

to consider whether we might not, with advantage both to soul and body, take a leaf out of our neighbour's book.

The extremes of character in civilized man are to be found in the Asiatic and the American,—the silent, dignified, placid, and stagnant Mussulman,—and the striving, pushing, restless, progressive Yankee. Between these extremes lie the easy and joyous Celt, generally contented with the passing hour, but often contented with too little; the stationary and phlegmatic German of the south, cautious and unambitious, frugal and complacent; the Norwegian, whose life in most things resembles that of his Teutonic brethren; the Swiss, who approximate nearer to ourselves; and finally the British, only a few degrees less ambitious, insatiable, unresting, and discontented than their western offspring. In the appendix to the second part of Layard's *Nineveh*, there is a letter from a Turkish Cadi, so thoroughly Oriental in its spirit, so exactly portraying those peculiar features of character in which the East differs from the West, and so amusingly astounding to men accustomed to look upon exertion, the acquisition of knowledge, and the progress of wealth, as the great ends of existence, that we cannot do better than quote it. The traveller had astonished the weak mind of his Mussulman friend, by applying to him for some statistical information regarding the city and province in which he had dwelt so long as a man in authority. The Turk replies with this dignified and affectionate rebuke:—

“My illustrious friend, and joy of my liver !

“The thing you ask of me is both difficult and useless. Although I have passed all my days in this place, I have neither counted the houses nor have I inquired into the number of the inhabitants ; and as to what one person loads on his mules, and another stows away in the bottom of his ship, that is no business of mine. But above all, as to the previous history of this city, God only knows the amount of dirt and confusion that the infidels may have eaten before the coming of the sword of Islam. It were unprofitable for us to inquire into it.

“Oh, my soul ! oh, my lamb ! seek not after the things which concern thee not. Thou camest unto us, and we welcomed thee : go in peace.

“Of a truth, thou hast spoken many words ; and there is no harm done, for the speaker is one and the listener is another. After the fashion of thy people, thou hast wandered from one place to another, until thou art happy and content in none. We (praise be to God) were born here, and never desire to quit it. Is it possible, then, that the idea of a general intercourse between mankind should make any impression on our understanding ? God forbid !

“Listen, oh my son ! There is no wisdom equal unto the belief in God. He created the world ; and shall we liken ourselves to Him in seeking to penetrate the mysteries of His creation ? Shall we say, Behold this star spinneth round that star, and this other star with a tail cometh and goeth in so many years ? Let it go ! He from whose hand it came will direct and guide it.

“But thou wilt say unto me, Stand aside, oh man, for I am more learned than thou art, and have seen more things. If thou thinkest that thou art in this respect better than I am, thou art welcome. I praise God that I seek not that which I require not. Thou art learned in the things I care not for ; and as for that which thou hast seen, I defile it. Will much knowledge create thee a double stomach, or wilt thou seek Paradise with thine eyes ?

“Oh, my friend ! If thou wilt be happy, say, There is no God but God ! Do no evil, and thus wilt thou fear neither man nor death ; for surely thine hour will come !

“The meek in spirit (El Fakir.)

“*IMAUM ALI TADE.*”

We think our readers will agree with us that there



is something very touching in this singular effusion, with its strange mixture of complacent ignorance and pious trust, its content bordering on apathy, and its lofty compassion for the laborious follies of the struggling and toiling Frank. Of course we are not writing to recommend such a state of mind. We merely wish to observe that it contains the germ and element of a wisdom to which our busy bustling existence is a stranger. As a pendant to this epistle we may give an anecdote that we once heard, of that class of Celts who in *insouciant* content most nearly resemble the Asiatics. A cosmopolite traveller, journeying in Lower Canada, was one day greatly struck by the contrast in the appearance of two adjoining properties, both having a river frontage, both enjoying a fertile soil, and apparently exactly alike in all natural advantages. The first was admirably farmed, and neatly kept; the house homely but substantial, and in good repair; the fences strong, uniform, and in faultless order. This belonged to an Englishman. The adjacent farm was in a very different condition; the flocks and herds were ample; the crops not bad, and the dwelling large and ample; there was no appearance of poverty, but every sign of indolence and carelessness,—the buildings dilapidated, the roofs defective, the fences, not indeed inefficient, but patched, as you seldom see except in Ireland, with odds and ends of trees, old gates, &c.; here a gap stopped by a plough; there a break made good by a cart tilted up in the opening. Our narrator visited

the owner, a French colonist, and received of course a most hospitable welcome. His host was cheerful and complacent. After some conversation the visitor remarked that the roof was broken through in one or two places, and let in the rain. "C'est égal (said the proprietor), I have only to move my bed to another part. I can always find a dry corner to lie in." "But," observed the traveller, "I notice that your fences are in the same state, full of holes and make-shifts." "Qu'est ce que cela fait! (asked the host), they do well enough to keep my cattle in and other people's out!" "Possibly" (replied the traveller), "but look at your neighbour, in what beautiful condition his hedges and divisions are kept." This was too much for the Frenchman: his native philosophy broke out at once. "Ah oui! *le misérable!*" he exclaimed in a tone of indescribable contempt; "that man toils from morning till night; is up before daylight, and working after dark: never goes to merry-makings: I would not be like him for worlds. I have enough; what need I more? *Can a man eat with two spoons?*"

But apart from these extreme cases of content where content ought not to be, it is impossible to become acquainted with those instances of rational and well-founded satisfaction with a most moderate and limited present, of which continental life offers us so many examples, without feeling, or at least suspecting, that, as compared with our hurried and turmoiling existence, our neighbours have chosen the better part. Look at Norway, for example, which has attained, as nearly as

possible, to that "stationary state" which most economists regard with dread, aversion, and a feeling akin to shame. There the inhabitants may be said to form one vast middle class; there is no great wealth, no absolute destitution; peasants and proprietors live on together, generation after generation, on the same land, and much in the same style as their forefathers; fuel and food, though simple, are both abundant; the men till the soil and fell the timber; the women manufacture at home the clothing they need; each man's life, whether he be farmer, labourer, or artisan, is pretty much cut out for him by circumstances and custom; as he grows up, he steps into the vacant niche in the community which was waiting for him (or if not vacant, he waits for it), without any thought of exchanging it for a different one, or struggling out of it into one higher; there is much comfort, but little luxury—much cheerfulness, perhaps too much conviviality; there is general equality and general content. It is easy to *live* there—not easy, scarcely possible, to grow rich; the country is peopled pretty nearly up to its resources, so that population can increase but slowly; as young men and maidens arrive at maturity, they fall in love, and are betrothed as elsewhere, but they do not marry till a "houseman" dies, or till, in some way or other, room is made for them; their sole desire and aim is, to enjoy their natural share of the goods of life, but not to increase that share beyond the usual rate; they are satisfied to equal, and do not aspire to surpass their father's lot.

Thus their existence glides on from the cradle to the grave, broken by no tumultuous crises, embittered by no pressing anxieties, shortened by no fierce competition, goaded by no wild ambition, darkened by no dismal failures,—but happy in a continuous activity, moderate in its aim, and sure of its reward. They are stationary, but not stagnant.

In Auvergne, we find a state of society almost precisely similar. There the peasants are nearly all proprietors, and often rich, for they spend little and cultivate well. The hoardings, when spent at all, are spent in land; everything is made at home; sometimes literally nothing is bought except the drugs to dye their wool; they live simply, but plentifully; and generation succeeds generation in the same industrious and monotonous content. Wars and revolutions pass over their country; but they scarcely hear of them, and rarely feel them. In Switzerland, too, especially in the Cantons of Berne and Zurich, we find much of the same primitive, unvarying, and enjoyable existence, though here the curse of “indebtedness,” which seems inseparable from the law of equal succession, often sheds a perpetual gloom over the life of the peasant proprietor. But when he has escaped this evil, and has found the small estate which sufficed to his ancestors suffice for him also, and when his younger brothers have gone to foreign countries, to seek or make their fortunes,—the Swiss farmer has always appeared to us to enjoy one of the happiest of human lots. Educated, industrious, pious, and patri-

otic, the citizen of a free state small enough for him to feel an appreciable unit among its inhabitants,—in a situation which nourishes no ambition that he may not readily gratify, and yet exempts him from those gloomy cares and forebodings as to the future, which wear away the lives and sadden the domestic circle of thousands among the Americans and English,—there is much in his existence which we may well envy, and not a little which, perhaps, we might emulate.

In Germany, especially in central and southern Germany, we find a numerous class of middle life—to which we have no analogon in England—who possess an assured but a moderate competence at which they are certain to arrive in time. They have not, as in England, when they have chosen their profession, and undergone their education, to plunge into the hot strife and race of competition, and take their chance of obtaining a maintenance or a prize by overcoming and distancing their rivals. If they have passed through the ordained curriculum and performed the required tasks, their future is provided for, and they have only to wait for its realisation, which comes, indeed, a few years sooner or later, but about the advent of which they need to give themselves no anxiety. As functionary, or surgeon, or lawyer, or master tradesman, their turn will come as soon as the niche they were destined to fill becomes vacant; for the government, by its complicated and vigilant arrangements, has taken care that no profession shall be overstocked,—that there shall be no more

aspirants than there are posts for them to fill. We are not now expressing any opinion as to the advisability of such a system of leading-strings; we only call attention to one of its effects—which is the exemption of a large proportion of the middle and educated classes from harassing anxieties about their future or that of their children, and the consequent diffusion of a sort of quiet happiness and somewhat apathetic content of which here we have no conception. These men of scanty but of certain expectations enjoy the present in a respectable and often most worthy manner; they are educated, and have a moderate amount of intellectual and more of æsthetic taste; they love social pleasures, and have ample leisure for them; unless singularly gifted, they know they must remain in the humble sphere in which their route is traced; they have no grandeur to hope for, and no destitution to fear; *ils ont de quoi vivre*, as the expression is, and in order to be thoroughly happy need only to cut down their desires to the level of their means. Their life is a quietly flowing stream, somewhat languid, perhaps, with many bright flowers growing on its banks, which they have leisure both to admire and to cull; they do, perhaps, little for their generation, but they lead a not undignified, and assuredly not an unenjoyed or morose, existence; they may cultivate all the amenities, and affections, and many even of the elegances of the domestic circle, and if their minds are well trained and furnished, they may add to these the pleasures of calm and con-

templative literary habits. Yet their income is of an amount which (after making full allowance for the different cost of living in the two countries) with us would be considered as utterly inadequate to afford means for a happy or comfortable life, and to be content with which would be held to argue deplorable want of energy and enterprise.

In France, too,—though long years of change and convulsion have diffused a longing discontent and restlessness through the urban population, which too often is fever only and not energy,—there still remain many in moderate and humble circumstances, professional men, clerks, and subordinate *employés*, who, on a pittance which would be considered as grinding poverty in England, contrive not only to support life, but to embellish it and enjoy it. They make the best of what they have, instead of anxiously striving to increase it. They “cut their coat according to their cloth.” They are not tormented by the desire to imitate or to equal those to whom fortune has been more bountiful. They are contented to *enjoy*, while their analogues in England would be fretfully labouring to *acquire*. They are not, as we are, for ever haunted by something in the distance to be obtained or to be escaped. They do not, like us, immolate the possessed present on the shrine of an uncertain future. They do not pull down their house to build their monument. They perform cheerfully and faithfully their humble and, perhaps, uninteresting functions, and devote the rest of their time to simple, social, un-

ambitious enjoyments. There are others again who, finding themselves at their entrance into life in possession of a moderate competence—a small patrimonial inheritance—deliberately pause to decide on their career. On the one side lie the possibilities of wealth, the gauds of distinction, the gratification of commercial or political success, to be purchased by harassing and irritating strife, by carking cares, by severe and unremitting toil. On the other, lie the charms of a life of unaspiring ease, of quiet nights and unanxious days, of the free enjoyment of the present hour—something of a butterfly existence, in short. Nine Yankees out of ten would choose the former; nine Frenchmen out of ten will prefer the latter. We do not here intend to pronounce which is right; but it is hard to persuade ourselves that *all* the wisdom—*all* the true estimate of the objects and the worth of life—lies with the man who decides for the thornier and rougher path.

Now let us cast a glance at the contrasted tone of English and American social existence: we may class them together, for the main difference is, that in America, our state of struggle is even more universal, and carried on under more favourable prospects of success. And we have still a few who cling to the “even tenor” of existence as the preferable state: in our exaggerated and caricaturing descendants, scarcely any such are to be found. Now, we are no advocates for a life of inaction and repose. Activity is better



than stagnation; exertion in pursuit of any object, is better than an existence with no object at all. We know well that out of dissatisfaction with our present condition, have arisen all our successful conquests of higher and more desirable conditions; that to the restless energy and aspiring temper of the Anglo-Saxon, may be traced a large proportion of the material progress, and not a little of the intellectual progress, of the world; that civilization, if it does not consist in perpetual advance, at least owes its origin and present perfection to perpetual endeavour. But we cannot permit ourselves to regard the struggle to be rich as worthy of admiration for itself. We cannot bring ourselves to regard the gallant and persevering energy which is devoted to "getting on in life," as consecrated to a high aim. We cannot persuade ourselves at once, and without inquiry, as many do, to pronounce the life that enjoys, as *ipso facto*, and *per se*, meaner than the life that toils. We mourn over energies wasted by misdirection, as well as over energies suffered to lie dormant and die out. The man who strives for a clear duty or a noble prize is beyond question a higher and worthier being than the man who glides through life in happy and innocent tranquillity; but we are by no means so sure that the man who, having a *competence*, spends years, and strength, and spirits, and temper, in striving for a *fortune*, has made a wiser or a better choice than the man who, having a competence, sits down thankfully and contentedly to enjoy it with his family and friends.

*To be able* to make "the future and the distant predominate over the present," is unquestionably to have risen in the scale of thinking beings; but it by no means follows, that whatever is distant and future ought to predominate over what is present and at hand. We agree altogether in the tone of the following remarks from the pen of our first and most genial political economist:—

"I cannot regard a stationary state of capital and wealth, with the unaffected aversion manifested toward it by political economists of the old school. I am inclined to believe that it would be, on the whole, a very considerable improvement on our present condition. I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress. The northern and middle States of America are a specimen of this stage of civilization in very favourable circumstances; having apparently got rid of all social injustices and inequalities that affect persons of Caucasian race and of the male sex, while the proportion of population to capital and land is such as to ensure abundance to every able-bodied member of the community who does not forfeit it by misconduct. They have the six points of chartism, and they have no poverty; and all that these advantages seem as yet to have done for them (notwithstanding some incipient signs of a better tendency) is, that the life of the whole of one sex is devoted to dollar-hunting, and of the other to breeding dollar-hunters. This is not a kind of social perfection which philanthropists to come will feel any very eager desire to assist in realizing. Most fitting indeed is it, that while riches are power, and to grow as rich as possible the universal object of ambition, the path to its attainment should be open to all, without favour or partiality. But the best state for human nature, is that in which, while no one is poor, no one desires to

to be richer, nor has any reason to fear being thrust back by the efforts of others to push themselves forward.

“That the energies of mankind should be kept in employment by the struggle for riches, as they were formerly by the struggle of war, until the better minds succeed in educating the others to better things, is undoubtedly more desirable than that they should rust and stagnate. While minds are coarse, they require coarse stimuli; and let them have them. In the mean time, those who do not accept the present very early stage of human improvement as its ultimate type, may be excused for being comparatively indifferent to the mere increase of production and accumulation. I know not why it should be a matter of congratulation, that persons who are already richer than any one need to be, should have doubled their means of consuming things which give little or no pleasure, except as representatives of wealth; or that numbers of individuals should pass over every year from the middle class into a richer class, or from the class of the occupied rich into that of the unoccupied.”\*

It is indeed a sad spectacle, that of so vast a proportion of the national energy still devoted to mere material acquisition, still labouring in a field in which such ample harvests have been already gained, still pushing on in a direction where there is little left to win,—while so many social problems remain still unsolved, so many grievous wounds still unhealed, so many noble paths still unfrequented or unexplored. We still press madly forward in the race, though the goal can present us with no new attractions; we still struggle “to get on,” though we have got far enough to command all the substantial acquisitions and enjoyments of a worthy life; we still persist in striving and toiling for added wealth, which can purchase for us no added happiness; and in the hot competition we push

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\* Mill's *Pol. Econ.*, ii. 318,—3d Ed.

aside or trample down many who really *need* what we only *desire*. New roads, vaster ships, more rapid and cheaper locomotion, speedier transmission of intelligence, greater physical comforts,—all these are valuable things, and objects of legitimate exertion. But of these we have now almost enough; we have pushed on long enough and far enough in this exclusive line; there are other fields to be tilled, other harvests to be reaped, other aims to be achieved. Thousands and thousands of course must, till some blessed change comes over our social state, spend life in striving for a living, and thousands more must concentrate all their exertions on the acquirement of a competence; but why should this competence be made, by our increasing luxuriousness, an ever-vanishing point? And why should those on whom no such hard necessity is laid, imitate their needier brethren? Why should not those who have a fortune sufficient to supply all reasonable wants, and to guarantee them against anxious cares, pause awhile upon the dusty and weary thoroughfare, and try to form a juster estimate of the purpose of life, and the relative value of its aims and prizes? Why should we so cling to the undoubted but fragmentary truth that enjoyment lies only in the race, in the contest, in the effort? The successful barrister at the summit of his profession and the height of fame, is so overwhelmed with business that he has time neither for sleep, nor society, nor recreation, nor literature; his strength is overtaken, his life is slipping away, he has not even leisure for the sweet amenities of the

domestic circle; he is amassing thousands which he does not want and cannot spend; he is engrossing briefs which poorer men thirst for in vain;—yet when does he ever resign a portion of his business to hungry competitors? when does he ever resolve upon “shorter hours,”—less toil combined with less emolument? When does he ever say to himself—“I will no longer spend my labour for that which is not bread, and for the food which satisfieth not; I will pause, I will rest, I will enjoy, I will contemplate, I will consecrate my remaining years to my family, to my country, to my soul?”—The physician, in the same way, who has worked his way up to the first practice and reputation, and is earning wealth far beyond his needs, and has no rest night nor day,—who can never take up a book, and seldom finish a dinner, and scarcely ever go into society, and only at rare intervals run for a hasty holiday into the country,—how rarely does he retire and leave the field to rising rivals, till his infirmities compel him? In these and similar cases, indeed, it often happens that it is not the desire of acquisition, nor yet the love of their profession, which retains these men in their unresting harness, but the conviction that they could enjoy no other life; they remain “slaves of the oar” because they could not be happy in their freedom. They have lived so long and so exclusively in their work that they have lost all relish for the simpler and quieter enjoyments of existence; literature and science have no longer any charms for them: political and public objects, ignored or forgotten for

long years, cannot now excite their interest, and their sympathies with social life have become extinct or feeble. What greater condemnation can be passed upon the narrow groove in which their life has run—upon the partial and fragmentary cultivation of their being which has brought them to this pass—upon the social system which so favours this one-sided, machine-like, incomplete, undignified existence! It is true that as matters are now arranged in England, and in the state of fierce competition in which we live, and move, and have our being, this devotion of the whole man to his work seems indispensable to success—it is one of our most grievous social evils that it should be so; but it is owing very much to the very instinctive and pertinacious strife “to get on” which we complain of—a strife not indeed objectless, but continued long after the original object has been obtained. For if our mode of life were simpler, if our standard of the needed or the fitting were more rational and less luxurious, if our notion of a “competence” were more real and less conventional, and if we were more disposed to stay our hand when that competence was gained,—this competition would become far less severe and oppressive; men might possibly have to work nearly as hard in their several callings, but they *would work for fewer years*, and the earlier retirement of the successful would make more frequent openings for the needy and the striving; the barrister and physician would be satisfied with making their £5000 or £10,000 a-year for fifteen years instead of for twenty-

five ; and they would have the double gain of creating a vacancy for others, and of retiring themselves before life had become wholly dry, dull, disenchanting, and unenjoyable.

The thing wanted is the general adoption of a juster and worthier estimate of the true meaning, pleasures, and purposes of life—a perception that existence was given us for noble aims, not for sordid acquisitions—that when a sufficiency is once attained, the pursuit of wealth brings many cares, sacrifices, and privations, and its acquisition can purchase only fresh luxuries which bring no fresh enjoyment. If this idea could but gain entrance into the upper circles of society ; if the rich and great—those whose well-established and recognised position gives them absolute freedom, if they choose to take it—instead of living in a style of inordinate luxury which others are always endeavouring to ape or emulate, were to set an example of simplicity and moderation, to exchange gorgeousness for taste, to prefer the arts which adorn life for those which merely minister to its voluptuous smoothness, to desert a career of hollow splendour and joyless show for one of true and beneficent social influence ; if those who can and do give the tone and decide the direction of the national mind, would, out of true wisdom and real preference, tacitly impose upon themselves some “sumptuary laws,” and adopt a style of living which should make display vulgar, and opulence therefore comparatively useless,—it is not easy to conjecture how rapidly the contagion of

the sound example would spread downwards, how vast a proportion of the supposed necessities of genteel life would be instantaneously swept away, and how sudden a chill would come over the present universal and feverish passion for unnecessary wealth. Sound political economy would frown upon no such triumph of rationality ;—those who resolve to live sensibly need not fear that they will thereby infringe any scientific principles or natural laws. We preach no restriction of civilised man to the simple requirements of the savage ; we wage no war against acquired tastes or artificial wants ; we do not seek to discourage those who can, from indulging in the elegancies or cultivating the refinements which soften and embellish life ; we only desire to limit luxurious expenditure to that which confers real and not unworthy enjoyment, and to terminate the pursuit of wealth when all the means of true happiness which wealth can purchase are already in our reach. We would at least have every man be content with the full goblet, without seeking to dissolve within it the needless and untasted pearl. We wish to see the middle and upper life of England less a scene of bustle, of effort, and of struggle, and more one of placid content and intellectual serenity ; less of a mad gallop, and more of a quiet progress ; less of a dusty race-course, and more of a cultivated garden ; less of a career which disgusts us in our hours of weariness and sickens us in our moments of reflection, and more of one which we can enjoy while we tread it, and look back upon without shame and regret when it is closed.



Need we fear that the world would stagnate under such a change? Need we guard ourselves against the misconstruction of being held to recommend a life of complacent and inglorious action? We think not. We would only substitute a nobler for a meaner strife—a rational for an excessive toil—an enjoyment that springs from serenity, for one that springs from excitement only; we would enable our countrymen to find happiness in contemplation *as well as* in action. To each time its own preacher, to each excess its own counteraction. In an age of dissipation, languor, and stagnation, we should join with Mr Carlyle in preaching the “Evangel of Work,” and say with him, “Blessed is the man who has found his work—let him ask no other blessedness.”\* In an age of strenuous, phrenzied, feverish, excessive, and often utterly irrational and objectless exertion, we join Mr Mill in preaching the milder and more needed “Evangel of Leisure.”

“The worth of work does not surely consist in its leading to other work, and so on to work upon work without end. On the contrary, the multiplication of work, for purposes not worth caring about, is one of the evils of our present condition. When justice and reason shall be the rule of human affairs, one of the first things to which we may expect them to be applied is the

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\* “Who art thou that complainest of thy life of toil? Complain not. Look up, my wearied brother; see thy fellow-workmen there in God’s eternity, surviving there, they alone surviving, sacred band of the immortals, celestial body-guard of the Empire of mankind. Ever in the weak human memory, they survive so long as saints, as heroes, as gods, they alone surviving; peopling, they alone, the unmeasured solitudes of time.”—PAST AND PRESENT.

question:—How many of the so-called luxuries, conveniences, refinements, and ornaments of life, are *worth* the labour which must be undergone as the condition of producing them? The beautifying of existence is as worthy and useful an object as the sustaining of it, but only a vitiated taste can see any such result in those fopperies of so-called civilisation, which myriads of hands are now occupied and lives wasted in providing. In opposition to the ‘Gospel of Work,’ I would assert the Gospel of Leisure, and maintain that human beings *cannot* rise to the finer attributes of their nature compatibly with a life filled with labour. . . . . To reduce very greatly the quantity of work required to carry on existence, is as needful as to distribute it more equally; and the progress of science, and the increasing ascendancy of justice and good sense, tend to this result.”\*

The second point in which it appears to us that continental life has greatly the advantage over our own, is in the aspect which poverty assumes. Rarely in France or in Germany does it sink so low as with us. Far more seldom does it reach the form of destitution. Scarcely ever does it descend to such squalor as in our great cities. Many causes combine to produce this enviable difference; sometimes it is purchased at a price which we are not prepared to pay; but of the fact of the difference there can, we believe, be no question. We all know how incessantly of late years our sympathies have been aroused, and our feelings shocked and pained, by pictures of the awful depths to which misery descends in the courts and alleys of our great metropolis, as well as of Edinburgh and Glasgow; of human beings living by hundreds in dens filthier than styes, and more pestilential than plague hospitals; of men, women, and children

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\* Fraser's Magazine.

huddled together in dirt, disorder, and promiscuity like that of the lower animals; of girls delicately bred, toiling day and night for wages utterly inadequate to the barest maintenance; of deaths from long insufficiency of food; of deaths from absolute starvation. We are not prepared to indorse the heart-rending and sickening delineations of Mayhew, Kingsley, and Dickens,\* in all their details, but neither are we able to withhold our assent to their rough and general fidelity. They are too far confirmed by the cold official statements of blue books for that. Poverty, then, in Great Britain assumes many and frequent forms of aggravated wretchedness and squalor, which change its character from a condition of privation to one of positive infliction, which make life a burden, a malady, and a curse. In France and Germany, we believe we are warranted in stating, these abysses of misery are scarcely found—or only as anomalous and most astounding exceptions. We never hear of them in Vienna. We believe they could not exist there. There is nothing like them in Munich, Dresden, or Berlin. Sir Francis Head and Lord Ashley put themselves in the hands of an experienced resident in Paris with a request that they might be taken to the very worst haunts and dwellings of the lowest portion of the population, and this is the testimony Sir F. Head gives:—

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\* “London Poor;” “Alton Locke;” and “Bleakhouse;”  
“Tom-all-alone’s.”

“I must own it was my impression, and I believe it was that of Lord Ashley, that the poverty we had come to witness bore no comparison whatever to that recklessness of personal appearance, that abject wretchedness, that squalid misery, which—dressed in the cast-off tattered garments of our wealthy classes, and in clothes perforated with holes not to be seen among the most savage tribes—Ireland annually pours out upon England, and which, in the crowded courts and alleys of London I have so often visited, produce among our own people, as it were, by infection which no moral remedy has yet been able to cure, scenes not only revolting as well as discreditable to human nature, but which are to be witnessed in no other portion, civilised or uncivilised, of the globe. . . . In another locality, La Petite Pologne, we found the general condition of the poorer classes in no way worse than those we had just left. On entering a large house, four stories high, running round a small square hollow court, we ascertained that it contained rather more than 500 lodgers, usually grouped together in families or little communities. In this barrack or warren, the rooms, paved with bricks, were about fifteen feet long, ten feet broad, and eight feet high. We found them, generally speaking, clean and well ventilated, but the charge for each chamber unfurnished was six francs a month. . . . In the most miserable district in the west end of Paris, we also failed to meet with anything that could be said to add opprobrium to poverty. The inhabitants of the few houses we entered were, no doubt, existing upon but very scanty subsistence, but in every case they appeared anxious to preserve polite manners and to be clean in their dress. In the Rue de la Roche, No. 2, we entered a lodging-house, kept by a clean, pleasing-mannered woman, and as all her lodgers were out at work, we walked over her establishment. The rooms, which were about eight feet seven inches in height, contained, nearly touching each other, from three to five double beds; for each of which she charged ten sous a night, or 2½d for each sleeper (in London the charge is usually 4d). Each room had one window, and we found every one wide open.”—*Head's Fagots of French Sticks*, i. 114—118.

Now when we remember that England is beyond comparison richer than these Continental States, and that the earnings of our labouring classes are far higher

than those of the same classes in either France or Germany—higher even in reference to the price of the necessaries of life ; and that we are accustomed to regard ourselves as standing at the head of European civilization, and as having pursued a more enlightened social policy than other nations ; there is much in the contrast we have noticed that should startle us into inquiry and reflection. What are the causes of a phenomenon so painful and discreditable to us ? As a general rule the labouring poor abroad are more *respectable* in their character and mode of life than their analoga in England—not certainly cleverer, not better workmen, not made of more sterling stuff, than most of the same class with us, but still leading generally a more decent, worthy, satisfactory, social existence ; their peasants are more contented, better-mannered, less boorish, and (when unexcited) less brutal, and more comfortable, though often with fewer of the raw materials of comfort ; their artisans are steadier, soberer, more cheerful, more saving, and more sensible than ours ; and even their *very* poor, destitute, and forlorn, are less wretched, less squalid, less absolutely abandoned and despairing than ours.\* Why is

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\* Even classes like the “distressed needlewomen” seem far less miserable in Paris than in London. Compare the following from “Un Philosophe sous les toits,” with the harrowing pictures given us in “Margaret,” “Alton Locke,” and “Realities :”—

“Je me suis trouvé dans un wagon près de deux sœurs déjà sur le retour, appartenant à la classe des Parisiens casaniers et paisibles dont j’ai parlé plus haut. Quelques complaisances de bon voisin-

this? And when we thus come to compare the results of our opposite notions and proceedings in matters of social policy, is there not reason to suspect that, even if the ultimate and average verdict be given in our favour, we may not be so *wholly* right nor our neighbours so *wholly* wrong as it has hitherto pleased us to imagine? There must surely be something good and imitable in a system under which, while *poverty* is more general, *misery* is less frequent and less extreme than in our free, prosperous, and energetic land.

One of the causes which contribute to this superiority, in Germany at least, we have already incidentally noticed, and we shall pass it over the more briefly as it is of a nature which we could not imitate or approach. We allude to the care taken by the governments of central Europe that there should be a calling, an opening, a mode of livelihood for every one of their citizens as he reaches manhood—a place at life's banquet in short, to use Malthus's illustration. They

age ont suffi pour m'attirer leur confiance; au bout de quelques minutes je savais toute leur histoire.

“Ce sont deux pauvres filles restées orphelines à quinze ans, et qui, depuis, ont vécu comme vivent les femmes qui travaillent, d'économie et de privation. Fabriquant depuis vingt ou trente ans des agraffes pour la même maison, elles ont vu dix maîtres s'y succéder et s'enrichir, sans que rien ait changé dans leur sort. Elles habitent toujours la même chambre, au fond d'une de ces impasses de la rue St Denis où l'air et le soleil sont inconnus. Elles se mettent au travail avant le jour, le prolongent après la nuit, et voient les années se joindre aux années sans que leur vie ait été marquée par aucun autre événement que l'office du dimanche, une rome nade, ou une maladie.”

take vigilant cognizance of each man's means of support, and do not allow him to marry till these means are reasonably adequate. In Norway, no one can marry without "showing, to the satisfaction of the clergyman, that he is permanently settled in such a manner as to offer a fair prospect that he can support a family." In Mecklenburg, marriages are delayed by the conscription in the twenty-second year, and by military service for six years; besides which the parties must have a dwelling, without which the clergyman is not allowed to marry them. In Saxony "a man may not marry before he is twenty-one, if liable to serve in the army. In Dresden, artisans may not marry till they become masters in their trade." In Wurtemberg and Bavaria (besides being obliged to remain single till the termination of the period fixed for military service), "no man may marry without permission, and that permission is only granted on proving that he and his wife have between them sufficient to establish themselves and maintain a family; say from 800 to 1000 florins in large towns; 400 to 500 in smaller ones; and in villages 200 florins, or about £16." In Lubeck, Frankfurt, and many Cantons of Switzerland, similar regulations are in force.\* It is difficult to say that there is anything in them which is inconsistent with justice or a fitting amount of social freedom, since the universal and tacit custom in modern civilized states, of compell-

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\* See Senior on Foreign Poor Laws. Answers obtained from our consuls abroad.

ing the community to maintain those who cannot maintain themselves, certainly implies and involves a correlative right on the part of the community to watch that the number of these public burdens shall not be selfishly or wantonly augmented ;—and after all, these regulations only impose by law upon the poor the restrictions which the middle and upper ranks by habit, and voluntarily, impose upon themselves. But these restrictions are too foreign to our national notions to be adopted here as externally imposed fetters : all that can be hoped for is that in time our labouring classes may become enlightened enough to assume them of their own free will, as they become conscious of the beneficial effect they could not fail to produce on their condition, and cognizant of the general though moderate and monotonous well-being which they are instrumental in diffusing among the inhabitants of central Europe.

A second cause, and perhaps the most frequent and the most powerful of all, in producing the contrast we have noticed in the aspect of French and English poverty, is the more habitual sobriety of the labouring class on the other side of the Channel. The vice of intemperance, or where it does not reach that point, the custom of indulgence in spirituous liquors, so unhappily prevalent in our country, may not only do much to account for whatever is peculiarly afflicting and disreputable in the condition of our poor, but is *the* one main reason why, in spite of our general prosperity, this class has not risen to a height of comfort, ease, and opulence unparalleled in the old world.



As is well known, our working classes yearly waste in the purely mischievous enjoyments of the palate a sum nearly equal to the whole Imperial revenue,\*—a sum which, if suffered to accumulate, would soon render them capitalists; if invested in annuities or savings' banks, would secure them against the day of reverse or incapacity; if judiciously expended, would raise them at once to a condition of comfort, respectability, even of luxury, and, if they desired it, of comparative leisure. A cessation of this expenditure would be equivalent to raising the earnings of every poor man's family throughout Great Britain, by £10 a year, or four shillings a week. But this would be the smallest portion of the saving. The whole habits and mode of life of the individual would be regenerated. The *home* would become happy; the whole domestic circle would be a scene of peace instead of strife. There would be few filthy dwellings, few neglected children, few of those scandalous cases of wives half-murdered by their drunken husbands, which now disgrace every police court in our cities. It is impossible to over-colour or exaggerate the change which that one circumstance would make. All who have had to do with the poor know how directly, how inevitably, how rapidly, a habit of drinking, yielded to by the head of the family, changes poverty into destitution, stinted means into squalid wretchedness, a home into a den. The French artisan comparatively seldom gives way to this

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\* Mr Porter has shown that this amount cannot be less than £54,000,000 per annum.

dreadful vice, and seldom, therefore, incurs the sordid misery which is its invariable consequence. He is often, generally, much poorer than his English brother; his fare is scantier; his house is smaller; his bed is harder; but he rarely aggravates these privations gratuitously by gross indulgence; seldomer still does he cast these privations on his wife and children, while living in wasteful intemperance himself.

But connected with this greater sobriety, and operating in the same direction, is another cause of the superiority of the French poor man. He is by no means always better educated, but he has nearly always, whether from nature or training, a degree of taste and imagination of which our poor are sadly destitute. These qualities give him, in however straitened circumstances he may be, a fondness for the embellishments and amenities of life, which makes him strive against squalor to the very last. He refuses to accept an utterly unornamented and inelegant existence, and because he is pinched, overworked, and even almost destitute, he does not see why he should also become thoroughly hopeless, spiritless, and degraded. Much of this æsthetic superiority is owing, no doubt, to original difference of constitution; much of it may, we believe, be traced to peculiarities of education. The French peasant is probably in general as ignorant as our own; but in what education he does receive there is mingled less that is merely rudimentary and mechanical, and more that is imaginative and refining. This is still more the case with the German and the

Swiss. They have less of the alphabet instilled into them, but more of music, poetry, and the sentiments of poetry. Altogether, the temperament of the labouring class on the Continent, while sometimes more excitable, and sometimes more homely and stupid than in England, is nearly always more poetical. One fact has always struck our attention very strongly in France, and still more in Holland. In the worst dwellings of the poor—we do not mean the haunts of the actually vicious and criminal, but, in the wretched attics, seven or eight stories high, quite in the roof, and with little light, which must be fearfully close in summer, and painfully cold in winter—we almost always see the little window not only ornamented by a coarse muslin curtain, but adorned with flower-plots, or boxes of cress, or mignonette, or some humble vegetable, and evidently tended with the utmost care. There will never be absolute despairing squalor, however great the poverty, where there is this love of flowers, this passion for fragments of simple nature. Here is a sketch of the proceedings of a poor old soldier, who inhabited the garret opposite that of our philosopher:—

“ On reconnaît le militaire à sa démarche cadencée, à sa moustache grise, et au ruban qui orne sa boutonnière ; on le divinerait à ses soins attentifs pour le petit jardin qui décore sa galerie aérienne ; car il y a deux choses particulièrement aimées de tous les vieux soldats, les fleurs et les enfans. . . . Aussi le vent froid n’a pu chasser mon voisin de son balcon. Il laboure le terrain de ses caisses vertes ; il y sème avec soin les graines de capucine écarlate, de volubilis, et de pois de senteur. Désormais il viendra tous les jours épier leur germination, défendre les pousses naissantes contre l’herbe parasite ou l’insecte, disposer les fils conducteurs

pour les tiges grimpantes, leur distribuera vec précaution l'eau et la chaleur.

“Que de peines pour amener à bien cette moisson ! Combien de fois je le verrai braver pour elle, comme aujourd'hui, la froid ou le chaud, la bise ou le soleil ! Mais aussi, aux jours les plus ardents de l'été, quand une poussière enflammée tourbillonnera dans nos rues, quand l'œil, ébloui par l'éclat du plâtre, ne saura où se reposer, et que les tuiles échauffées nous brûleront de leurs rayonnements, le vieux soldat, assis sous sa tonnelle, n'apercevra autour de lui que verdure ou que fleurs, et respirera la brise rafraîchie par un ombrage parfumé.”

How rarely do we find among our town poor this cherishing of flowers and green plants ! and how invariably, when we do find it, is it a sign of a comparatively refined disposition, and hopeful if not easy circumstances !

The same difference of character in the two people manifests itself in other ways. An English artisan will spend any extra earnings in adding to his comforts or luxuries,—a French one in purchasing another ornament. The cottage of the Englishman will often be better furnished and more comfortable ; but everything in it will be for use, not show. The Frenchman will have fewer chairs, a less solid table, and a poorer bed ; but he will probably have a bit of a mirror, or an ornamental clock. He will have scantier and very inferior crockery, but is nearly certain to have a fragment of Sèvres China on his chimney-piece or chest of drawers. He will feed much worse in order that he may look somewhat better. There is something of the swell, and something also of the decayed gentleman, about him. He will live in the poorest garret, and on

the scantiest crust,—food and lodgings which the English artisan would scout,—in order that he may drink his *eau sucrée* and read his journal at a decent *Café*, or take his wife and children a walk on the boulevards or in the Tuileries gardens in respectable attire. The desires and expenditure of the Englishman may be for the more solid good ; but we doubt whether the preferences of the Frenchman are not far the surest guarantee against sinking in the social scale.\* The love of the latter for holidays and gala days, we hold also to be a wholesome safeguard, even though sometimes carried a little too far. These festivals are something to look forward to, something to save for, something to enliven and embellish an otherwise monotonous existence. Man's nature requires these breaks and brighteners to keep up its elastic spring ; without them he becomes dull and spiritless, or gross ; he cannot without injury to both soul and body live on work and sleep alone ; to keep up heart, to maintain cheerfulness, through the dull routine, the daily repetitions, the hot and dusty thoroughfares of this world's ordi-

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\* “ Riding through Normandy one beautiful Sunday evening, I overheard a French peasant decline the convivial invitation of his companion. ‘Why—no, thank you,’ said he, ‘I must go to the *quinquette* for the sake of my wife and the young people, dear souls!’ ”

“The next Sunday I was in Sussex, and as my horse ambled by a cottage, I heard a sturdy boor, who had apparently just left it, grumble forth to a big boy swinging on a gate: ‘You sees to the sow, Jim, there’s a good un ; I be’s just a-going to the Blue Lion, to get rid of my missus and the brats—rot ’em.’”—*Bulwer’s England and the English.*

nary lots, some of these gay, stirring, enlivening "solutions of continuity" are imperatively needed. We, in this country, have far too few of them; and it is not easy to say how much of the depth to which poverty allows itself to sink is owing to this paucity.

"Lord, help us poor people!—and *that's* my defence—  
If we've nothing to trust to but wisdom and sense!"

The ready and susceptible imagination of the Frenchman, too, must be of inestimable service in enabling him to embellish and glorify his poverty in ways that an Englishman would never dream of. Not only we believe are our poor, as a general rule, more discontented with their lot in life than the same class among our mercurial neighbours, but even where submissive and uncomplaining, they are so in a different spirit. The Englishman accepts his meagre fare and humble position *doggedly*, when the Frenchman accepts them cheerfully. The latter makes the best of matters, and puts a bright face on everything that will bear it; the former is too apt to take a diametrically opposite course. How 'un-English' is the following narrative. The next neighbour of our Philosopher in the garret is an old soldier named Chaufour, *minus* one leg and one arm, and earning a scanty subsistence by working at coarse paper articles from long before sunrise till long after nightfall. He explains to his companion that he lost his leg at Waterloo, and his arm 'while working in the quarries of Clamart:—

“Après la grande débâcle de Waterloo, j'étais demeuré trois mois aux ambulances pour laisser à ma jambe de bois le temps de pousser. Une fois en mesure de ré-emboîter le pas, je pris congé du major et je me dirigeai sur Paris, où j'espérais trouver quelque parent, quelque ami ; mais rien ; tout étoit parti, ou sous terre. J'aurais été moins étranger à Vienne, à Madrid, à Berlin. Cependant, pour avoir une jambe de moins à nourrir, je n'en étais pas plus à mon aise : l'appétit étoit revenu, et les derniers sous s'envolaient.

“A la vérité, j'avais rencontré mon ancien chef d'escadron, qui se rappelait que je l'avais tiré de la bagarre à Montereau en lui donant mon cheval, et qui m'avait proposé chez lui place au feu et à la chandelle. Je savais qu'il avait épousé, l'année d'avant, un château et pas mal de fermes ; de sorte que je pouvais devenir à perpétuité brossueur d'un millionnaire ; ce qui n'étoit pas sans douceur. Restait à savoir si je n'avais rien de mieux à faire. Un soir je me mis à réflexion.

“—Voyons, Chauffour, que je me dis, il s'agit de se conduire comme un homme. La place chez le commandant te convient ; mais ne peux-tu rien faire de mieux ? Tu as encore le torse en bon état et les bras solides ; est ce que tu ne dois pas toutes les forces à la patrie, comme disait l'oncle de Vincennes ? Pourquoi ne pas laisser quelque ancien plus démoli que toi prendre ses invalides chez le commandant ? Allons, troupier, encore quelques charges à fond puisqu'il te reste du poignet. Faut pas se reposer avant le temps.

“Sur quoi j'allai remercier le chef d'escadron et offrir mes services à un ancien de la batterie qui étoit rentré à Clamart dans son *foyer respectif*, et qui avait repris le pince de carrier.

“Pendant les premiers mois, je fis le métier de conscrit, c'est-à-dire, avec plus de mouvements que de besogne ; mais avec de la bonne volonté on vient à bout des pierres comme de tout le reste ; sans devenir, comme on dit, une tête de colonne, je pris mon rang, en serrefile parmi les bons ouvriers, et je mangeais mon pain de bon appetit, vu que je le gagnais de bon cœur. C'est que, même sous le tuf, voyez-vous, j'avais gardé ma gloriole. L'idée que je travaillais, pour ma part, à changer les roches en maisons, me flattait intérieurement. Je me disais tout bas.

—“Courage, Chauffour, mon vieux, *tu aides à embellir ta patrie*. Et ça me soutenait le moral.

“Malheureusement, j'avais parmi mes compagnons des citoyens

un peu trop sensible aux charmes du cognac ; si bien qu'un jour, l'un d'eux, qui voyait sa main gauche à droite, s'avisa de battre le briquet près d'une mine chargée ; la mine prit feu sans dire gare, et nous envoya une mitraille de cailloux qui tua trois hommes et m'emporta le bras dont il ne me reste plus que la manche.

—“ Ainsi, vous étiez de nouveau sans état ? ” dis-je au vieux soldat.

—“ C'est-à-dire qu'il fallait en changer, ” reprit-il tranquillement. “ Le difficile était d'en trouver un qui se contentât de cinq doigts au lieu de dix : je le trouvais pourtant. ”

—“ Oû cela ? ”

—“ Parmi les balayeurs de Paris. ” (*Scavengers.*)

“ Quoi ! vous avez fait partie — ? ”

“ *De l'escouade de salubrité* : un peu, voisin, et ça n'est pas mon plus mauvais temps. Le corps de balayage n'est pas si mal composé que malpropre, savez-vous ! Il y a là d'anciennes actrices qui n'ont pas su faire d'économies, des marchands ruinés à la bourse ; nous avions même un professeur d'humanités, qui, pour un petit verre, vous récitait du Latin ou des tragédies, à votre choix. Tout ça n'eût pas pu concourir pour le prix Monthyon ; mais la misère faisait pardonner les vices, et la gaieté consolait de la misère. J'étais aussi gneux et aussi gai, tout en tâchant de valoir un peu mieux. Même dans la fange du ruisseau, j'avais gardé mon opinion que rien ne déshonore de ce qui peut être utile au pays. ”

—“ Cependant vous avez fini par quitter votre nouvelle profession ? ” ai-je repris.

—“ Pour cause de réforme, voisin : les balayeurs ont rarement le pied sec, et l'humidité a fini par rouvrir les blessures de ma bonne jambe. Je ne pouvais plus suivre l'escouade ; il a fallu déposer les armes. Voilà deux mois que j'ai cessé de travailler à *l'assainissement de Paris*. ”

‘ Au premier instant, ça m'a étourdi. De mes quatre membres, il ne me restait plus que la main droite ; encore avait elle perdu sa force. Fallait donc lui trouver une occupation *bourgeoise*. Après avoir essayé un peu de tous, je suis tombé sur le cartonage ; et me voici fabricant d'étuis pour les pompons de la garde nationale ; c'est une œuvre peu lucrative, mais à la portée de toutes les intelligences. *En me levant à quarte heures et en travaillant jusqu' à huit*, je gagne 65 centimes (about 6½d.) ! Le logement et la gamelle en prennent 50 ; reste trois sous pour les dépenses de luxe. Je suis donc



plus riche que la France, puisque j'équilibre mon budget, et je continue à la servir, puis que *je lui économise ses pompons.*"

Now, it is possible that in reproducing these pictures of humble life on the Continent, we may have selected exceptions rather than examples; it may be that in contrasting the quiet and even tenor of middle-class life in Germany and France, with the turmoil, crush, and hurry of existence in England and America, we have drawn both in somewhat too vivid colours, and with too sharp an outline;—still we cannot doubt the general correctness of the impression we have received and endeavoured to convey; after every discount and deduction has been made the broad fact will still remain,—that if our analogues abroad are often too torpid, passive, and unenterprising, we, on the contrary, are too restless, striving, and insatiable; that *our* extreme is assuredly not the happiest, nor possibly the noblest; and that, at all events, without exchanging it for theirs, we might do well to abandon it for some *juste milieu*, in which our course of life might become "a sanity and not a madness."

## FALSE MORALITY OF LADY NOVELISTS.\*

IT is not easy to over-estimate the importance of novels whether we regard the influence they exercise upon an age, or the indications they afford of its characteristic tendencies and features. They come, indeed, under the denomination of "light literature;" but this literature is effective by reason of its very lightness: it spreads, penetrates, and permeates, where weightier matter would lie merely on the outside of the mind—*rudis indigestaque moles*. We are by no means sure that, with reference to the sphere and nature of the impressions they produce, prose works of fiction do not constitute precisely that branch of the intellectual activity of a nation which a far-seeing moralist would watch with the most vigilant concern, and supervise with the most anxious and unceasing care. The highest productions of genius, it is true,—great national epics or lyrics, works of pure reason that revolutionize a philosophy or found a school, histories that become classical and permanent,

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\* *Mildred Vernon: A Tale of Parisian Life in the last days of the Monarchy.* Colburn, 1848.

*Léonie Vermont: a Scene of our Time.* Bentley, 1849.

*Kathie Brande.* By Holme Lee. Smith and Elder, 1850.

*Ruth: a Novel.* By the Author of "Mary Barton." Chapman and Hall, 1853.

*Framleigh Hall.* Hurst and Blackett, 1858.

—the writings of the Shakespeares, Bacons, Descartes, Lessings, Dantes, Voltaires, and Goethes of all lands, have unquestionably a wider and a grander range of operation, and leave more profound and enduring traces of their influence : but their effects are less immediate and less direct ; they work deeper, but they work slower ; they work upon the few first, and afterwards through these upon the many : they affect the present age probably much less, but future ages infinitely more.

There are many reasons why we should look upon novels in this serious point of view. They are the sole or the chief reading of numbers, and these numbers are mainly to be found among the rich and idle, whose wealth, leisure, and social position combine to give to their tastes and example an influence wholly out of proportion either to their mental activity or to their mental powers. They are the reading of most men in their idler and more impressionable hours, when the fatigued mind requires rest and recreation, when the brain, therefore, is comparatively passive ; and when, the critical and combative faculties being laid to sleep, the pabulum offered is imbibed without being judged or sifted. They form, too, an unfortunately large proportion of the habitual reading of the young at the exact crisis of life when the spirit is at once most susceptible and most tenacious—

“ Wax to receive, and marble to retain ; ”

when the memory is fresh, and has a greedy and by no means discriminating appetite ; when the moral

standard is for the most part fluctuating or unformed ; when experience affords no criterion whereby to separate the true from the false in the delineations of life, and the degree of culture is as yet insufficient to distinguish the pure from the meretricious, the sound from the unsound, in taste ; and when whatever keenly interests and deeply moves is accepted and laid to heart, without much questioning whether the emotion is genuine and virtuous, or whether the interest is not aroused by unsafe and unwarrantable means. Finally, novels constitute a principal part of the reading of women, who are always impressionable, in whom at all times the emotional element is more awake and more powerful than the critical, whose feelings are more easily aroused, and whose estimates are more easily influenced than ours, while at the same time the correctness of their feelings and the justice of their estimates are matters of the most special and pre-eminent concern.

There are peculiarities, again, in works of fiction, which must always secure them a vast influence on all classes of societies and all sorts of minds. They are read without effort, and remembered without trouble. We have to chain down our attention to read other books with profit ; these enchain our attention of themselves. Other books often leave no impression on the mind at all ; these, for good or evil, for a while or for long, always produce *some* impression. Other books are effective only when digested and assimilated ; novels usually need no digestion, or rather present their matter to us in an already digested form.

Histories, philosophies, political treatises, to a certain extent even first-class poetry, are solid and often tough food, which requires laborious and slow mastication. Novels are like soup or jelly ; they may be drunk off at a draught or swallowed whole, certain of being easily and rapidly absorbed into the system.

A branch of literature which exercises an influence so considerable on men of leisure at all times, on men of business in their hours of relaxation, on the young of both sexes, and on the female sex at every age, assuredly demands the most thorough study and the closest censorship on the part of those who wish to comprehend, or who aspire to modify, the causes which mould humanity. There can be no doubt that a far larger number of persons receive the bias of their course and the complexion of their character from reading novels than from hearing sermons. We do not, indeed, hear of sudden conversions and entire and enduring changes of life and temper consequent on the perusal of romances, such as are occasionally said to follow the stirring eloquence of some great divine ; though we believe that more analogous cases might be found than is usually supposed, were there any missionary enthusiasts to chronicle them, and were the recipients of the new spirit skilful and careful to trace back the healing influence to its source. But we are convinced that the instances are numerous beyond conception in which souls trembling and hesitating on the verge of good and evil have been determined towards the former by some scene of fiction falling in their way at the critical

moment of their moral history ; in which minds have been sustained in hours of weakness and strengthened in hours of temptation, by lifelike pictures of sorrows endured and trials surmounted in virtue of some great principle or some true sentiment ; and in which sinners, fallen indeed, but not lost, have been induced to pause, to recoil, and to recover, by seeing in some work which they had opened only for amusement the hideousness of a crime whose revolting features they could not recognize except when reflected in a mirror. Numbers have first, not *learned* perhaps, but been actually brought to perceive and realize with practical result, the attractions of " whatsoever things are pure, holy, lovely, and of good report," by seeing their vivid delineations in the pages of " an owre true tale." Numbers who *might* no doubt have acquired their estimates of the relative gravity or excellence of favourite faults or difficult virtues from authorized Bibles or accredited moralists, have in reality learned them—often, alas, blended with a fearful degree of error—from fictitious histories ; and seek their personal code of laws in Scott, or Bulwer, or Victor Hugo, or George Sand, or the Countess Hahn-Hahn, or Manzoni, in place of drawing it direct and pure from the Catechism or the Gospel. And far larger numbers still, as we may all of us be conscious from our own experience, owe it to the novels with which they occasionally refresh their wayworn spirits along the world's hot and dusty thoroughfare, that the perception of the beautiful, the enthusiasm for the grand, and all the

finer sentiments and gentler and tenderer emotions which soften and embellish life, are not utterly dried up, or crusted over, or trodden out, amid the fatigues, and conflicts, and turmoil of this arid and weary existence.

There is yet another consideration which points in the same direction. Prose fiction furnishes not only the favourite reading of the young ; it is also the line in which young writers most incline to try their powers. A few of the more enthusiastic make their first essay in verse, but the large majority prefer novels. These are easier, they require less sustained effort, and they are incomparably more certain of an audience. Again, women, as we have said above, are the chief readers of novels ; they are also, of late at least, the chief writers of them. A great proportion of these authoresses too are *young* ladies. There are vast numbers of lady novelists, for much the same reason that there are vast numbers of sempstresses. Thousands of women have nothing to do, and yet are under the necessity of doing something. Every woman can handle a needle *tant bien que mal* : every unemployed woman, therefore, takes to sewing. Hundreds of educated ladies have nothing to do, and yet are tormented with a most natural desire, nay, are often under a positive obligation, to do something. Every educated lady can handle a pen *tant bien que mal* : all such, therefore, take to writing—and to novel writing, both as the kind which requires the least special qualification and the least severe study, and also as the only kind which will sell. The num-

ber of youthful novelists, and of young lady novelists, extant at this moment passes calculation, and was unparalleled at any former epoch. Indeed, the supply of the fiction market has mainly fallen into their hands ; and it speaks well for the general taste and cultivation of the age, that under such circumstances, so many of the new novels that pour forth weekly from the press should be really interesting and clever, and that so few should be utterly poor or bad. But it is in the nature of things impossible that productions of such a character, from such a source, however able or however captivating, should be radically and inherently defective. The plot may be exciting, the style may be flowing, the sentiments may be pleasing and even stirring, and the characters may be natural, interesting, and well sustained ; but the views of life and the judgments of conduct must be imperfect and superficial, and will often be thoroughly unsound. These things cannot be surely deduced, as is too often fancied, from certain fixed rules and principles which may be learned *a priori* ; they depend in a great measure on observation and experience, on knowledge of the world and of the characters that move and act there, and on the ascertained consequences of actions and influences of qualities. Now here the young are necessarily wanting. If the writer be a young man, his experience in life must be brief, imperfect and inadequate. If the writer be a young lady, her experience must be not only all this, but must be partial in addition. Whole spheres of observation, whole



branches of character and conduct, are almost inevitably closed to her. Nay, even with respect to the one topic which forms the staple of most novels, and a main ingredient in all, viz., love, and its various phases, varieties, and developments,—her means of judgment and of delineation must be always scanty and generally superficial. She may have felt the passion, it is true ; but she will have felt it only in one form,—the form congenial to her own nature ; she will be able, therefore, in all likelihood, to depict it only under one aspect, and will estimate its character and consequences from a personal point of view. She may possibly have enjoyed (or suffered) opportunities of observing the workings of the sentiment in some one of her friends ; but its wilder issues and its fiercer crises are necessarily and righteously hidden from her sight. She may, by dint of that marvellous faculty of sympathy and intuition which is given to those who have felt profoundly and suffered long, be able to divine much which she cannot discover, and to conceive much which she has never seen or heard ; and the pure and God-given instincts which some women possess in so rare a measure may enable her to distinguish between the genuine and the false, the noble and the low ;—but many of the saddest and deepest truths in the strange science of sexual affection are to her mysteriously and mercifully veiled ; and the knowledge of them can only be purchased at such a fearful cost that we cannot wish it otherwise. The inevitable consequence, however, is, that in treating of

that science she labours under all the disadvantages of partial study and superficial insight. She is describing a country of which she knows only the more frequented and the safer roads, with a few of the sweeter scenes and the prettier by-paths and more picturesque *détours* which lie not far from the broad and beaten thoroughfares; while the rockier and loftier mountains, the more rugged tracks, the more sombre valleys, and the darker and more dangerous chasms, are never trodden by her feet, and scarcely ever dreamed of by her fancy.

In youth, moreover, and in the youth of women more especially, there is a degree of exaltation of mind and temper which—beautiful as it is, and deeply as we should grieve over its absence—partakes of, or at least has a strong tendency to degenerate into, the morbid and unsound. It may add to the interest of a tale, but it renders it unfaithful as a picture of life, unsafe as a guide to the judgment, and often noxious in its influence on the feelings. In short—and to sum up in a single sentence the gist of all that we have said—that branch of the literature of our day which exercises the widest and most penetrating influence on the age,—from which the young and the impressible (nearly all of us, in short, at one period or other) chiefly draw their notions of life, their canons of judgment, their habitual sentiments and feelings (so far as these are drawn from literature at all), and their impressions as to what is admirable and right or what is detestable and wrong,—is to a great extent in the hands of writers whose experience of life is seldom

wide and never deep, whose sympathies have not yet been chastened or corrected, whose philosophy is inevitably superficial, whose judgment cannot possibly be matured, and is not very likely to be sound. The result is, that we are constantly gazing on inaccurate pictures, constantly sympathising with artificial or reprehensible emotions, constantly admiring culpable conduct, constantly imbibing false morality.

It is chiefly with reference to this last point that we are moved at present to bear testimony. A large proportion of the novels we have recently perused appear to us to inculcate principles so essentially erroneous, and to hold up to admiration characters and actions so intrinsically culpable and mistaken, that we should consider ourselves wanting in the discharge of our duty as ethical critics if we neglected to enter our protest, and to record the grounds of our dissent. The unsound and immoral doctrines which we wish especially to signalize, may be classed under four heads:—false notions of honour; egotistical notions of self-sacrifice; sinful notions of compassion; and distorted notions of the relative enormity of various failings and offences. And we propose to draw our illustrations from tales, all of which are remarkable for merits of no trivial order, and are written with the best intentions.

*Mildred Vernon* is a novel of more than ordinary excellence. It is unusually well written; the characters are well sustained; the conversations are

natural and lively ; the plot is one of great interest and is skilfully developed ; and although much of the society into which we are introduced is, both socially and politically, as bad as need be,—the scene being laid among the higher ranks in Paris towards the close of Louis Philippe's reign,—yet the tone and feeling of the book are good throughout, and the morality, while neither narrow nor severe, is on the whole pure, correct, and even high-minded. The life painted is corrupt and profligate to a startling degree ; but the author steers perfectly clear of the too common and most heinous faults of exciting dangerous passions by delineating scenes of temptation and of sin, or of enlisting the special interest of the reader on behalf of the splendid or voluptuous sinner. But this prevalent healthiness of sentiment and *justesse d'esprit* throw into still stronger relief the false notions of honour which are described and inculcated in the main *dénouement* of the story. .

Mildred Vernon is the beautiful, proud, pure, but somewhat puritanical and rigid wife of a baronet of strong passions, weak principles, ample wealth, and deep-rooted but not ostentatious selfishness. She loves him as an ordinary English wife loves an ordinary English husband,—that is, hers was a love-match,—and she is most dutifully devoted to him in all points ; but her deeper feelings have never been awakened, and she has no more notion that she could ever be tempted than that she could ever sin. Sir Edward brings her to Paris, find access into one of the best

circles of the Faubourg St Germain, and establishes his wife therein ; and then himself falls under the influence of one of the most fascinating and vicious of the *lionnes* who infested the higher ranks in that profligate capital at that profligate epoch. He becomes utterly bewitched, and all his bad qualities are brought out by the corrupting and degrading connection. He neglects Mildred, insults her, outrages all her sensibility of feeling and all her ideas of virtue and decorum, unpardonably offends her dignity as a wife, and, as she is very strict and very proud, irretrievably alienates her affections. She has loved him for being what she had believed him ; she now despises and dislikes him, because she sees him as he really is. During the whole of this period she is constantly with the Duchess de Montévreux and her family. The son, Gaston de Montévreux, a cultivated and superior man, with all the French agreeable politeness and too much of the French laxity of morals, becomes ardently attached to her, sees her daily, and shields her as much as he can from a knowledge of her husband's misbehaviour. She, who is innocence itself, and cold not from nature but from habit and education, is for long wholly unconscious both of his devotion and of the degree in which her own feelings have become involved ; but as soon as the truth flashes upon her, she acts as an English matron should and will. She has never the least notion of weakly yielding ; but she perceives that her sentiments toward the young duke are such as ought not to be indulged, and that, deserted

as she is by her husband, she would be more fitly and safely situated among her friends in England, Thither accordingly she returns,—learning too plainly from the separation that Gaston has now become all in all to her. After an interval of some months he follows her; circumstances bring about a mutual *éclaircissement*; she does not deceive him as to the state of her affections, but compels him to be generous and to respect her. His love and character become purified by the purity and elevation of hers; she reminds him of all he owes to his family and his country, and at length induces him to show himself worthy of a love of which neither need be ashamed, instead of hankering after one which could only be successful by becoming sinful, and to return to France, and seek in the noble duties and excitements of public life either strength to forget, or patience to await. In consequence, contrary to all the principles and traditions of his family, who had hitherto held scrupulously aloof from the Orleans *régime*, he enters the Chamber, and becomes a distinguished senator and speaker.

Meanwhile Sir Edward Vernon is pursuing in Paris and at Baden a course of dissipation which is rapidly wasting his fortune and undermining his health, already shattered by a wound received in a disreputable duel. His wife's generosity, and the aid of her friends, rescue him from prison; but he declines to reunite their lives, and leaves her formally and finally. Mildred, who has returned to Paris in order to make her benevolent arrangements for Sir Edward, is now

daily in Gaston's company: all that is innocent in their love is gratified,—all that would be culpable and unworthy is banished, even in thought, far from them: and both, though in different measure, grow wiser, nobler, tenderer, and stronger, alike from the permitted happiness and the enforced control. All this is beautifully painted. But now comes the crisis of the story, and the occasion of the false morality. Gaston had been betrothed, as is customary in France, to a young cousin of his, Olympe, then only about fifteen, and in a convent. He had scarcely seen her; he had no feeling for her; the affair was a contract, a plan, a family arrangement. She was very pretty and very rich. The idea of marrying her was, of course, in Gaston's new circumstances, and under his new and purer notions of morality, rendered simply impossible to him by his absorbing and resolute attachment to Lady Vernon; and on one pretext or another, all consideration of the affair had been postponed. Gaston waited for some occurrence or reason which should avowedly release him from his engagement. While matters were in this position, nearly the whole of Olympe's fortune was invested by a speculative guardian in the scrip of a railway, the bill for authorising which (the *concession*, as it is there called) was then passing through the Chamber. The success of this bill would double Olympe's dowry; the rejection of it would sweep it nearly all away. Gaston, wholly unconscious of this complication, carefully examines the railway project on its merits, decides against them,

and makes so convincing a speech in the Chamber, that the *concession* is refused. (All this, be it said, is absurdly improbable in France at such a time. But let that pass.) That very day he had written to the mother of his cousin, to decline fulfilling his engagement with her; but Madame de Montévieux had intercepted and delayed the letter, and Olympe's ruin, caused by Gaston's speech, made it apparently *impossible* to send it now. The painful and difficult character of the dilemma is visible at a glance, especially when we add that, to complete it, and before the sacrifice is consummated, Sir Edward Vernon dies suddenly and as disreputably as he had lived, and leaves Mildred free.

The solution of a difficulty such as this is as good a test as could well be devised of the soundness of the moral philosophy of the author, and the principles and resolution of the actors involved. In this case, it is solved according to the radically immoral notions of "honour" prevalent in the highest ranks of most countries. Gaston at first is determined to be true to his instincts and his love; but his mother and the pious and holy confessor (the Abbé de Nangis) and poor Mildred,—whose somewhat *exalté* disinterestedness and generous concern for Gaston's reputation Madame de Montévieux is cruel enough to enlist for her purposes,—all decide against him; and he yields. He marries his cousin, whom he does not love; and sacrifices Mildred, whom he does love, and whose devoted fondness he has gained by years of passionate



promises and vows, and more recently by daily intercourse of the most intimate and confiding sort. And all parties concerned are regarded as having done not only what was right, but what was most eminently and sublimely virtuous. Now what are the motives which decide them, and the arguments to which Gaston yields? That "the world" will attribute Gaston's breaking off the match to the loss of Olympe's fortune, and that the irreproachable good fame and sacred "honour of an ancient and noble family" will be in consequence irreparably tarnished. "The Duc de Montévieux" will *be thought* to have acted meanly. It is true, the mother urges both to Mildred and to her son that Lady Vernon's reputation would be in danger of being compromised—(again the eyes of "the world,")—as she would be considered the cause of Gaston's having taken such a step; but this is only thrown in as a make-weight, and is clearly of little real influence, inasmuch as, if the first explanation would be so sure of adoption by the censorious public, the second need not have been sought for. What, then, is the plain English of the whole? Gaston commits a *lâcheté* and a crime to avoid *being thought* guilty of a baseness. He behaves cruelly to Mildred, lest the world should believe he has acted shabbily to Olympe. He breaks his faith, lest he should be supposed to have stained his honour. With his whole heart and soul bound up in one woman, he goes to the altar with another, and plights to her his exclusive devotion and his eternal tenderness. He prefers the reality to the

appearance of doing wrong and acting falsely. A saintly priest blesses and applauds the hideous falsehood and the barbarous sacrifice; and all the four participators in this sin fancy they have risen to the very zenith of martyred virtue.

This error is the more to be deplored, because, in one most touching episode in these volumes, the writer has instinctively seized upon the true moral view, where merely conventional thinkers would have missed it. The story of Madame de Bois Lambert is one of the most touching we ever read. Pure, noble, and tender, with all the mingled softness and intensity of feeling due to her Spanish and Moorish origin, and brought up by her mother in the doctrine that a promise, to whomsoever and under whatsoever circumstances given, is to be sacredly fulfilled, she in early youth yields her affections and plights her truth to a remarkable young man named Lionel Chavigny. He is *bourgeois*; and her family, therefore, would forbid the match had they ever dreamed of its possibility, and had they not designed their daughter for the Marquis de Bois Lambert, a fine dignified general, but now in middle life. The poor girl consults her confessor, the Abbé de Nangis, who, finding how irrevocably her heart is fixed, at last consents to aid her so far as to persuade her mother to postpone the proposed marriage with the general for a year or two. Lionel is summoned to Spain: in about six months, a report of his marriage, false, but so corroborated as to leave no room for question, reaches her; and in the revulsion of grief and

despair, she consents to marry M. de Boislambert whenever her parents wish it. With him she enjoys seven years of such modified happiness as a heart so deeply wounded can obtain; for her husband, though somewhat formal, and too dignified to manifest the true and deep affection which he feels, is an excellent and noble friend, full of kindness and indulgence; and she has two sweet children, on whom she lavishes all the boundless tenderness of her nature. Suddenly Chavigny reappears; she learns the mistake which has lost her to him for ever, and sees how fearfully the bitterness of her supposed faithlessness has changed him. Her self-reproach is deep and dangerous; she mourns over and would fain redeem the moral ruin she has wrought. Lionel, whose knowledge of the world and cool consummate science make him one of the most formidable of men, takes advantage of her mood, and in a moment of wild and passing delirium she is lost. It was but a moment; the revulsion was immediate; her shame and grief were overwhelming. She leaves her husband's house *alone*; for Chavigny declines to ruin her reputation as well as her peace by accepting the sacrifice she offers; but she will not deceive the husband she has betrayed, and refuses to return home. The story soon becomes known, and even in Paris excites deep regret and sympathy; for Louise is universally worshipped and beloved. Every one—even her husband—feels it impossible to attach the idea of *guilt* to the momentary frenzy of one so pure; and M. de Boislambert, when, after the lapse of a

year, he has discovered her retreat, allows her to see her children, and conquered by his own love and her deep contrition and intrinsic excellence, offers pardon and reconciliation. The scene which ensues is one of the most affecting in any work of fiction. The poor afflicted, humbled wife, overcome by her husband's attachment and generosity, and yearning more than words can tell to be back with him and with her children, yet fears that she ought not to accept a forgiveness of which few could comprehend the grandeur or the beauty, and which, therefore, would expose him to ridicule and evil tongues. So far all is sound and genuine feeling. But now comes in that fascinating notion of self-sacrifice, so fatal when perverted and *sentimental*; and Louise, feeling that she has "no right" to be so happy, determines that duty compels her to make all connected with her as unhappy as she can. Two considerations finally, after a fearful struggle, decide her to decline her husband's love, and to leave him for ever, because she had left him for an hour. *First*, she says that she has "the sins of two souls upon her conscience," and her life must henceforth be devoted to an expiation for them both: so she becomes a *Sœur de Charité*, and deserts the duty of consoling and cheering the husband and the children whom God has given her; for that of consoling and cheering the miscellaneous poor whom she may find in hospitals! And, *secondly*, she argues that she must not expose her husband to the ridicule which "the world" attaches to the husband who forgives; and, to clench

the argument, when one of the most outrageous *lorettes* of Paris, in passing her, lets fall a remark about "improper persons," she turns to M. de Boislambert, and says (as if this practical proof admitted no rejoinder), "You see, Ferdinand, it *cannot* be!" If this be not deplorable weakness and distortion, our notions of right and wrong must be far astray."

*Léonie Vermont* is, like *Mildred Vernon*, a picture of happiness abandoned and love trampled under foot in obedience to misty and crooked notions of what honour and dignity enjoin. The Comte de Briancour, a legitimist noble of the true old incurable type, adopts and brings up with his own children the son and daughter of a comrade of inferior rank,—in fact, a sergeant of his regiment,—who had saved his life in battle. The brother and sister receive a good education, but grow up as different as it is possible to conceive. Philippe Vermont, who proves to have considerable talents as an artist, is a type of everything that is mean and revolting in the French character. Ambitious, envious, treacherous, and malignant, without principles as without convictions, an admirer of sensual beauty and caring only for sensual enjoyment, he adopts Republican views in their worst and lowest form, goes to the metropolis, and there leads a life of alternate political intrigue, profligate pleasure, and pictorial success. His sister Léonie—an ardent and enthusiastic republican; a true daughter of "the People," and believing above

all things in the people's nobleness ; grand, beautiful, and haughty, full of elevated sentiments and commanding courage,—reads her brother's character to its very depths, and distrusts, despises, and dislikes him. Ferdinand de Briancour, the only son of the count, is a young poet of honourable and refined sentiments, considerable ability, and liberal though decidedly monarchical in his political opinions. Brought up with Léonie in the retirement of a country-house, he, as might be expected, falls in love with her ; and she after a while returns his affection, with all the concentrated strength of her vigorous and unsophisticated nature. But she is too proud to dream of marrying Ferdinand without the count's consent, and the count's consent both the lovers well know will never be given to a *mésalliance*. So they resolve to love on, and wait patiently for better days. In the mean time the whole family go to Paris, and the Revolution of 1848 breaks out. Philippe Vermont, who has been a leading member of those secret societies where socialism was preached as a creed and assassination enjoined as a duty, and which so largely contributed to the fatal success of that most deplorable outbreak, becomes a great man, and is represented as holding the position actually assigned to Louis Blanc. He revels in all the joys of luxury and power ; his selfishness, meanness, and the utter insincerity of all his ultra-liberal professions, become daily more manifest ; and ever fresh instances of his profligacy unveil his character more and more to his

disgusted connections. With the establishment of regular government his post is taken from him; he fails (while Ferdinand succeeds) in being elected a member of the Chamber, and sinks down into one of the most desperate and dishonest of the insurgent conspirators of June. The dreadful scenes of that three-days' conflict are well described. Philippe is there, but in safety, and adds cowardice to his other vices. He is on the barricades at last; and when the gallant and saintly Archbishop of Paris appeared amid the combatants, cross in hand, towards the end of the third day, to prevent further bloodshed, Philippe's was supposed to be the hand which fired the fatal shot which slew that venerated prelate, whose death struck both parties with horror. Philippe escapes to England; but is burnt in effigy by the populace, and condemned *par contumace* by the authorities.

And now comes into play the paltry, distorted, fanciful morality which we denounce. As soon as this catastrophe and Philippe's reported share in it become known, Léoine, though heart-broken by the conviction, determines that her engagement with Ferdinand must be broken off; that their union thenceforth would be a crime in her and an infamy to him; and not only his saintly sister, Madame Isabelle, and the saintly priest, the Abbé de Lavergne, but Ferdinand himself, while wild with grief at the decision, at once accept it as obviously and indisputably inevitable. The marriage from that moment becomes in the eyes of all a guilty *impossibility*.

The author's mind here seems to grow as muddy as those of her heroines and heroes ; and her development of this, the *dénouement* of her story, is singularly weak and inconclusive. Observe :—The engagement between Ferdinand and Léonie was entered into with the full knowledge on the part of both of Philippe's utter lowness and unworthiness of nature ; neither of them dreamed that the brother's vice could tarnish or obscure the sister's inherent nobleness, or render her union with a high-minded and long-descended gentleman other than an equal and a righteous match ; and both Madame Isabelle and the Abbé sanctioned and blessed the project. They subsequently discover that Philippe has seduced and ruined a poor girl in whom they were deeply interested, and that his desertion has driven her to suicide ; but their pain and indignation lead to no ideas menacing their love. They learn that he is the leader of a band of secret conspirators, whose object is anarchy and pillage, and among whose means is murder ; yet this even raises no barrier between the lovers. They know him to be infamous in every way, and by every title ; yet never dream that the infamy of the brother disgraces or implicates the sister, or makes her a thing which an honourable man may not take to his bosom and cover with his name. But no sooner do they see him burnt in effigy amid the curses of the mob whom he had abandoned and misled,—no sooner do they learn that he (like so many other insurgents) has been condemned to the galleys *he had all along deserved*,—no sooner do they



hear that his is said to have been the hand that slew the Archbishop (though no evidence of the fact can be obtained, and though the tenor of the narrative implies that the fatal shot, if fired by him at all, was not designed for the martyred prelate, but for a personal antagonist with whom he was struggling in a mortal conflict),—than the mask falls from their eyes at once, and they perceive, as by a flash of lightning, that “a name” so infamous as that of Vermont can never mingle with a name so noble as that of Briancour! What hollow selfishness, what cruel pride, are here decked out in the rich plumes of “Honour!” What a poor and unreal passion comes in to claim the crown of martyrdom, and calls upon Religion to cast her halo round the shallow fallacy! For, of course, the Abbé applauds, and even urges the self-sacrifice; and sends Léonie, with “upturned eyes” and broken heart, into a convent. Observe once more (that we may tear away the veil completely from this *exalté* and high-sounding sophistry): Philippe Vernon has committed crimes and meannesses *worthy* of the galleys, yet Léonie, indignant and disgusted as she is, feels no dishonour recoiling upon her, nor does Ferdinand shrink from the sister on account of the brother’s abject and alien nature; but as soon as he receives (though in his absence) the legal recompense of his deeds, *then* all must be ended between them. He is already so infamous, that no condemnation, however public, can make him more so: his condemnation teaches *them* nothing new, but it proclaims all to the world; and herein lies the sting,

the difference, the damning and deciding fact ! Léonie renounces her affianced husband, and Ferdinand accepts the renunciation, not because Philippe *is* a cowardly and blood-stained ruffian, with whom the remotest connection is inherent shame, but because he has been discovered and denounced as such. And finally, to complete the distortion of view manifest throughout :—All the blood which Philippe has indirectly shed, all the ignorant assassins whose hands he has armed and whose fury he has whetted, raise no dividing cloud between Léonie and her betrothed ; but in a civil conflict he *accidentally* slays an archbishop who is bearing the emblem of peace to the insurgents ; he is believed to have undesignedly imbrued his hands in the blood of a venerated prelate ;—and forthwith the avenging angel, who has connived at all the *lay* slaughter for which the same criminal is accountable, stands with his flaming sword between the innocent lovers, and drives them from their common paradise !

Once for all—on this subject of “self-sacrifice,” we would exhort sentimental and ethical romance writers to clear and purify their fantastic and flatulent morality, and substitute healthy strength for morbid and unnatural excitement. The power of surrendering and renouncing the dearest hopes and happiness of life at the clear command of DUTY, whether that duty be religious, political, or linked with the affections, is the divinest of human faculties, and its exercise affords the sublimest spectacle that can be witnessed on this earth ; but to make this sacrifice to

family pride, to the world's breath, to the wrong passions or the shallow prejudices of others, is a spurious and histrionic counterfeit. It is building an altar to a false god; it is endowing with your dearest wealth the shrine of a mistaken faith; it is enthroning and worshipping a weakness which, however amiable and unselfish, is a weakness still. And when, as in almost all these instances is the case, the sacrifice made involves the happiness of another person as well as our own, and entails, as usually happens, deception practised on a third, the deed becomes a wrong and a cruelty as well as a mistake. And considering the tendency, so prevalent among all moralists and most scrupulous and sincere minds, to imagine a course of conduct to be especially virtuous simply because it is especially difficult and painful; and the probability therefore that these heroic sacrifices of ourselves and others will generally be made in those moods of exaggerated generosity and feverish enthusiasm which are always dangerous, often artificial and almost inevitably transient,—it is especially incumbent on all who venture to paint such scenes and describe the feelings they excite, to beware lest they confound and misapply the fundamental principles of duty and *justice*, and lead those who desire to be guided by them to mistake idolatry for piety, and rush into misery at the dictate of an unsound and inflated sentiment when they fancy they are obeying the solemn voice of a divine decree. Frequent errors on this subject bring discredit on the grandest

virtue possible to man. We ought to be able to admire not only the courage of social martyrs, but their wisdom likewise, and not be perpetually condemned to the demoralizing task of lamenting that the power of acting right should be so often divorced from the faculty of seeing straight. That 'diversity of gifts' which assigns strong sense and sagacity to one man, and purity and disinterested purpose to another; that apparent poverty of the moral nature, which seems as if it could not afford to endow the same person with excellence and with talent, which makes the good so often feeble in intelligence and the sensible so often frail in conscience,—is one of the gravest trials to our faith;—and novelists have done much to make it heavier still.

*Kathie Brande* is another tale of injudicious and unkind, because self-considering self-sacrifice. The story is one of uncommon beauty, full of exquisite and gentle sentiment simply and charmingly expressed, and distinguished by a sustained elevation wholly free from exaggeration. Kathie's mother is a widow, in narrow but not uncomfortable circumstances, with four or five children, of whom Kathie is the eldest and the most important. She is betrothed to a sensible and exemplary young curate, and they are to be married in the spring. But her only brother, Stephen, is an idle, selfish, and utterly ignoble creature, caring for nothing but his own pleasures, and indifferent to his family, of which he is the chief burden, instead of

being its chief support. He has plenty of ability ; but he has no sense of decency, duty, or affection ; and he will not work. His mother strains her slender means to send him to the University ; where he disgraces himself, incurs debt to the amount of more than a thousand pounds in two years, and ends by getting himself expelled. In addition to this, he is mean enough to sponge upon his sister, whom he has impoverished, to supply his own luxuries and fancies. His family, in place of letting him meet the penalty of his wickedness and cruel folly, and forcing him to support himself, submit to the greatest privations to satisfy his creditors, and allow him, without a word of reproach or exhortation,—without even pointing out to him his obvious duty, which he does not even think of seeing,—to remain idly and expensively at home. Here was the first moral error : any one so selfish, insensible, and abject, could obviously be brought round only by the heavy pressure of personal suffering, and should have been forced to meet his own difficulties and atone for his own sins. But this was not all. In order to pay Stephen's debts and support Stephen's idleness, the small dowry which was to have enabled Kathie to marry Felix Mayne had to be surrendered, and the marriage had to be indefinitely postponed. Here was the second error— one more serious and patent than the first. This was not self-sacrifice alone ; it was sacrificing the happiness of *another*, who ought to have been and was dearer than herself, to her own views of what was

right and fitting. It was sacrificing a noble lover, whom she might have blessed, to a wretched brother whom her generosity could not redeem, but could only harden and confirm in his evil ways. Still, something might be said in defence of her disinterested error, for she was her mother's main stay; and when once the resolution to pay Stephen's debts had reduced them to poverty, her presence at home could scarcely have been dispensed with.

A few years pass on. Stephen, for whom so much had been endured and foregone, pursues a course of worthlessness ill-fitted to recompense those who had so loved and served him; Kathie grows thin and worn with toil, waiting, and soreness of heart; and Felix Mayne becomes soured and saddened by his loveless and solitary life. At last Kathie sees that it is wrong and selfish to retain a love which it may be years before she is able to reward, so she absolves Felix from his engagement. But Felix has become prosperous and famous. He refuses to be set free, declares he has enough for all, and urges her to bring her mother to live with them; for to this mother the family is now reduced. It is impossible to assign any sober or valid grounds for her refusal. But she *does* refuse; given over to this distorted notion of self-sacrifice, she is deaf to his entreaties, cruel to his enduring love, tells him that her mother could not bear dependence, sends him empty away; and then sinks back broken-hearted upon her desolate and darkened life. Now we do not say that a woman—and a noble and tender-

hearted woman too—might not have acted thus ; but we do say that the author ought to have represented this refusal as a deplorable error and not a sublime virtue, and to have pointed out how far the want of sound judgment detracted from the value of the noble impulse. The grander the moral faculty, the more important is it that it should be enlisted in a righteous cause.

*Framleigh Hall* is a novel of much interest and of many faults ; but of great promise also. It is evidently the production of a lady, and of a young lady, who has read and thought more than she has seen or felt ; but of whose powers, when they have been developed and enriched by the experience of life and a more wide and varied knowledge of the world we are inclined to augur very highly. The characters are all distinctly conceived, and their individuality is preserved throughout the tale,—a sure sign of clear thought and careful workmanship. The writer is evidently worthy of guidance and of warning, and we feel certain will take neither ill ; and therefore we have selected her romance as an example of wrong notions on a subject on which it is peculiarly important for women to have right ones. Her two heroines—one singularly attractive, and the other singularly excellent—set about committing a great sin under the delusion that they are obeying a solemn duty, and exercising a most virtuous and generous self-denial ; and the authoress seems almost wholly unconscious what an ethical enormity she is holding up to admiration.

Grenville is a young man of good property and considerable talents, handsome and elegant in his person, and, when he pleases, agreeable in society ; but without one single amiable or estimable quality. A tyrant at home and at school ; cruel, passionate, and brutal while a child, and through all subsequent stages up to finished manhood ; utterly selfish, and incapable of affection, tenderness, gratitude, or any generous and gentlemanly sentiment, though sometimes putting on an external varnish of good manners ; rude and even ruffianly, not only to his schoolmates, but to his mother, his sister, and his betrothed,—he is about the most unredeemably bad and detestable character ever drawn. Maurice Delamere is just the reverse of all this : of a delicate, nervous, and susceptible organization, physically timid, though morally and conscientiously courageous ; refined, cultivated, generous, and affectionate, but too irresolute to make his way in the world, and too shrinking and too conscious of his own defects ever to do himself justice in the eyes of others ; not fitted to win the hearts of ordinary women, but sure to make any woman happy who could understand and appreciate him, and sure to be externally grateful for such appreciation exactly because he felt it was what he could expect from few ; just the man also to be Grenville's victim ; as accordingly he is from infancy to death. Grenville has a sister, Isabella, in all respects his opposite,—somewhat sickly and not at all attractive, but a woman of strong principles and warm affections, thoroughly amiable and attached even to



her brother, though painfully and reluctantly conscious of his unworthiness, and long a sufferer from his hard and brutal selfishness. With her and her mother lives the heroine, Eugenia, a portionless cousin, beautiful, vivacious, uncultivated, and untamed ; but with all a woman's best instincts native and unspoiled within her. While very young, and incapable of estimating character, she attracted the fancy of her cousin Grenville, who was charmed by her grace and beauty, and longed for her as a plaything and an ornament ; and, pleased with his attentions and ignorant of his vice, she thoughtlessly consented to engage herself to him. He entered the army, and was some time absent. Even when at home he paid her scarcely any attention, yet exacted from her the amplest devotion and incessant compliance with his whims. She had no real affection for him, and began to weary of his selfishness ; but still continued to consider herself as pledged some day or other to become his wife. Meanwhile she met Maurice in society, and gradually grew intimate with him. His conversation and character opened a new world to her. She grew to be conscious of her want of culture, and to be anxious to supply the want. Maurice aided her ; not only developed and aroused her dormant sensibilities of mind and spirit, but supplied from the riches of his own nature the pabulum needed by the newly-awakened want. There is no influence so profound or irresistible as that exercised over an intellectual woman by the man who first stirs that intellect into conscious life, and can lead it

to the treasures which it longs to master, and guide it through the flowery and starry pathways which it yearns to tread. Eugenia—whose *heart* has never been touched—becomes unwittingly attached to Maurice; and Maurice, who is quite unaware of her engagement to his enemy and evil genius, loves her with intensest fervour. She soon becomes aware of this; and a visit which Grenville pays to his home, wherein he displays all the coarseness and violence of his bad and ungovernable nature, makes her feel forcibly the contrast of the two men, and determine that she can never give herself to so unbearable a master.

But Isabella, the suffering and affectionate sister of this domestic wretch, perceives the growing attachment; and aware how fatal it will be to her brother's hopes and happiness, sets resolutely to work to counteract it. She knows that her brother is wholly unworthy of a heart like Eugenia's; she is *dimly*, but refuses to be *clearly*, conscious that he will maltreat her and make her miserable; yet still she believes that the loss of his betrothed will not only disappoint him into fury, but drive him irretrievably into evil courses: for though as incapable of appreciating Eugenia as of deserving her, he undoubtedly loves her with a passion which is compounded of artist admiration and animal desire. Accordingly, Miss Grenville, though cognisant of the true and faithful mutual tenderness of Maurice and Eugenia, forgetting how sacred such affection is, determines to make these two

wretched that she may make one man imperfectly and transiently happy, and to sacrifice two noble and loving hearts to the pleasure of gratifying, and the hope of redeeming, her bad brother. She will blight their lives and mar their souls rather than that he should lose his plaything and his sweetmeat. She persuades and almost compels Eugenia into the conspiracy against herself, by representing to her what she owes to Grenville's father, to her own youthful promise, and to the prospect of reclaiming the irreclaimable; and, strange to say, her cousin yields to these wretched arguments, and consents to abandon Maurice, whom she loves, and to marry Grenville, whom she dreads, despises, and is fast learning to abhor.

Now, according to our reading of the moral law, such conduct is foolishly and scandalously wicked: and no self-suffering involved in it can make it otherwise. To marry one man while loving and loved by another, is about the most grievous fault that a decent woman can commit. It is a sin against delicacy—against purity even—against justice, against kindness, against truth. It involves giving that to legal right which is guilty and shameful when given to anything but reciprocal affection. It involves a double treachery and a double cruelty. It involves wounding the spirit, withering the heart, perhaps blighting the life and soiling the soul, of the one who is abandoned and betrayed. It involves the speedy disenchantment and the bitter disappointment of the one who is mocked by the shadow where he was promised the substance,

and who grasps only the phantom of a soulless beauty, and the husk, the shell, the skeleton of a dead affection. It entails ceaseless deception at home and abroad, by day and night, at our down-sitting and our up-rising; deception in every relation,—deception in the tenderest and most out-speaking moments of existence. It makes the whole of life a weary, difficult, degrading, unrewarded lie. A right-minded woman could scarcely lay a deeper sin upon her soul, or one more certain to bring down a fearful expiation. For Woman, in very truth, this is the sin against the Holy Ghost,—the “sin unto death,”—the sin which casts a terrible darkness over both worlds. Yet here are two pure and virtuous maidens preparing and persuading to commit it out of mere disinterested tenderness; and a third describing the Suttee, and, with applauding gestures, though with streaming eyes, encouraging the human sacrifice.

Novelists err grievously and habitually in their estimates of the relative culpability of certain sins, failings and backslidings. It must be admitted that the church and the world do generally err as grievously, and in the same direction. Frailties, which often indicate nothing worse than too much tenderness and too little strength, are spoken of and treated with a cruel harshness which should be reserved for, and might fitly be lavished on, the bitter, selfish, or malignant passions. The grasping and cruel man is gravely rebuked; on the feeble and erring woman is

poured forth a flood of virtuous indignation. The weak flesh is beaten with many stripes; the wicked spirit is gently told to go and sin no more. The tyrannical and selfish temper, that makes every one around it miserable, is blamed as an unamiable fault; the yielding folly, which can refuse nothing to one it loves, is denounced as an unpardonable sin. Provided a man is strictly honest, decorous in demeanour, and what we call "moral"—that is, not impure—in conduct, he is accepted by the novelist, he passes current in the world, he appears unrebuked before the altar;—though he be a tyrannical husband and a brutal father, though he be an abject flatterer, a cold hypocrite, or a haughty Pharisee; though he never hesitates for an instant either to gratify his own feelings or to trample on those of others. But provided a woman, however young, however ignorant in the world's ways, however desolate and sorely tried, has unloosed for one moment the girdle of her maiden innocence,—though the lapse may have been instantaneous, delirious, instantly repented and resolutely retrieved,—though in her essential nature she may still be all that is noble, affectionate, devoted, womanly, and unstained,—she is punished without discrimination as the most sunken of sinners; and, what is more especially to our present purpose, writers of fiction represent her as acquiescing in the justice of the sentence.

Now we say unhesitatingly that these are not righteous, as most assuredly they are not Christian,

judgments. Far be it from us to say one word calculated to render less strong, less lofty, less thorny, or less insurmountable, the barrier which protects female chastity in our land, or to palliate untruly that frailty which is usually a deplorable weakness, and sometimes a grave offence. Its gravity cannot easily be overstated; and, God knows, the penalty exacted is always most terrifically adequate. But we do say that truth and justice are both violated by those writers who persist in representing sins of frailty *in all instances* as either inherently so grave in their consequences to happiness, or so surely indicative of lost or absent excellence,—and therefore calling for such fierce denunciation,—as those sins of malignant passion, selfish spirit, and bitter temper, which are so usually accepted as natural, venial, and normal. The indulgence of the bad passions is surely worse than the indulgence of the soft ones; though it is guilty, because weak, in both cases. Yielding to temptation must be always sinful; but yielding to wishes not in themselves nor at all times wrong, cannot justly be condemned so sternly as yielding to passions inherently and invariably vicious, mean, or cruel. In this direction, at least, lay the judgment and the sympathies of Jesus, as the whole tenor of his words and deeds proclaims; for while he denounced the hard and cruel rulers of the land, the grasping lawyer and the supercilious Pharisee, with an indignation that was refreshingly human, he comforted and pardoned the frail wife and the weeping Magdalene

with a grave tenderness that was unmistakeably divine. He who spake as never man spake, he who saw what few other men could see, knew that, in the woman who has gone astray through the weakness of an ill-placed or thirsting affection, there might yet lie untouched depths of purity, self-devotion, and capacity for the loftiest virtue, which it would be vain to look for in the man whose cold and selfish bosom no tender or generous emotion had ever thawed, or in the man "who trusted in himself that he was righteous, and despised others."

These remarks have been suggested to us by the re-perusal of a most beautiful and touching tale, wherein the erroneous moral estimate we are signalizing appears in a very mild form ; and which, indeed, would appear to have been written with the design of modifying and correcting it, though the author's ideas were not quite clear or positive enough to enable her to carry out boldly or develop fully the conception she had formed. Mrs Gaskell's novel of *Ruth* is too well known to lay us under the necessity of narrating the story in detail. Ruth, innocent and beautiful, left an orphan and without connections, is turned out of doors at sixteen by a harsh and hasty mistress, in whose establishment she had been placed to learn dress-making ; and not knowing whither to turn in her despair, is persuaded by a gentleman, who had already half engaged her youthful fancy, to accept shelter and assistance from him. She goes astray, scarcely, if at all, knowing that she is doing wrong,

but from a gentleness of nature that never dreams of resisting the influence or the persuasions of those she loves. After a while her lover deserts her; and the remarks and behaviour of the world, and the teachings of an excellent dissenting minister and his sister, awaken her to a perception of the error she has committed and the light in which that error is regarded. The process by which her character is purified and elevated, and her fault redeemed, through the influence of Mr Benson and her passionate attachment to her child, is described with a fidelity to the deeper and truer secrets of our nature which is as beautiful as it is unique. Among the members of Mr Benson's congregation is a wealthy and influential merchant, Mr Bradshaw,—the very distilled essence of a disagreeable Pharisee; ostentatious, patronizing, self-confident, and self-worshipping; rigidly righteous according to his own notion, but in our eyes a heinous and habitual offender; a harsh and oppressive tyrant in his own family without perceiving it, or rather without admitting that his harshness and oppression is other than a sublime virtue; yet driving by it one child into rebellion and another into hypocrisy and crime, and arousing the angry passions of every one with whom he comes in contact; having no notion of what temptation is, either as a thing to be resisted or succumbed to, for the simple reason that all *his* temptations, which are those of pride, selfishness, and temper, are yielded to and defended as virtuous impulses; prone to trample, and ignorant of the very



meaning of tenderness and mercy. This man, reeking with the sins Christ most abhorred, turns upon the unhappy Ruth (who, after six years of exemplary life, has become a governess in his house), as soon as he accidentally learns her history, with a brutal, savage violence, and a coarse, unfeeling cruelty, which we need not scruple to affirm constituted a far greater sin than poor Ruth had committed, or would have committed had her lapse from chastity been wilful and persistent instead of unconscious, transient, and bitterly and nobly atoned for. Something of this very conviction was evidently in Mrs Gaskell's mind; and we can scarcely doubt that she placed Mr Bradshaw's hard and aggressive Pharisaism in such strong relief and contrast by way of insinuating the comparative moral we have boldly stated. In any case, such is the resulting impression which must be left upon the reader's mind. But what we object to in her book is this: that the tone and language habitually adopted throughout, both by Ruth herself and by her friends when alluding to her fault, is at war with this impression and with the true tenor of the facts recorded. Mrs Gaskell scarcely seems at one with herself in this matter. Anxious above all things to arouse a kinder feeling in the uncharitable and bitter world towards offenders of Ruth's sort, to show how thoughtless and almost unconscious such offences sometimes are, and how slightly, after all, they may affect real purity of nature and piety of spirit, and how truly they may be redeemed when treated with wisdom and

with gentleness,—she has first imagined a character as pure, pious, and unselfish, as poet ever fancied, and described a lapse from chastity as faultless as such a fault can be ; and then, with damaging and unfaithful inconsistency, has given in to the world's estimate in such matters, by assuming that the sin committed was of so deep a dye that only a life of atoning and enduring penitence could wipe it out. If she designed to awaken the world's compassion for the ordinary class of betrayed and deserted Magdalenes, the circumstances of Ruth's error should not have been made so innocent, nor should Ruth herself have been painted as so perfect. If she intended to describe a saint (as she has done), she should not have held conventional and mysterious language about her as a grievous sinner.

We have more to say upon this subject, for it is a wide and a very grave one ; but our space is exhausted, and we have probably drawn as largely as is wise upon our reader's attention. But the faulty religion, which disfigures modern novels nearly as much as false morality, may perhaps tempt us to take up the subject once more on some other occasion.

## KINGSLEY AND CARLYLE.

THERE are two living English writers who, wide as the poles asunder in many points, have yet several marked characteristics in common, and whom we confess to regarding with very similar sentiments—Mr Carlyle and Mr Kingsley. Both are eminent; both are popular; both have exercised, and are still exercising, a very unquestionable influence over their contemporaries: unquestionable, that is, as to degree; questionable enough, unhappily, as to kind. Of both we have frequently had occasion to speak with respect and admiration. We read them much, and recur to them often; but seldom without mixed feelings, of provocation, disappointment, and regret. We constantly lay them down outraged beyond endurance by their faults, and mentally forswearing them in future; we as constantly take them up again in spite of vow and protest, drawn back into the turbid vortex by the force of their resistless fascinations. In short, we feel and act towards them as men may do towards women whom they at once delight in, admire, and condemn; who perpetually offend their purer taste and grate against their finer sensibilities, but whose noble qualities and whose meretricious charms are so strangely vivid and so marvellously blended, that they can shake themselves

free from neither. For Mr Kingsley we have long ago expressed our hearty appreciation ; but there is a time to appreciate, and a time to criticise. Standing as he does \* at the zenith of his popularity, it is the fit time to speak of his shortcomings with that frankness which is the truest respect.

✓ The historian of *Frederick the Great* and the author of *Hypatia* have many points of resemblance, but always with a variation. They are cast in the same mould, but fashioned of different clays and animated by different spirits. Both are terribly in earnest ; but Kingsley's is the earnestness of youthful vigour and a sanguine temper ; Carlyle's is the profound cynicism of a bitter and a gloomy spirit. He is, if not the saddest, assuredly the most saddening of writers,—the very Apostle of Despair. Both seem penetrated to the very core of their nature with the sharpest sense of the wrongs and sufferings of humanity ; but the one is thereby driven to preach a crusade of vengeance on their authors, the other a crusade of rescue and deliverance for their victims. Mr Kingsley's earnestness as a social philosopher and reformer develops itself mainly in the direction of action and of sympathy : Mr Carlyle's exhales itself, for the most part, in a fierce contempt against folly and weakness, which is always unmeasured and sometimes unchristian. ✓ The earnestness of Carlyle, though savagely sincere, never condescends enough to detail or to knowledge to make him a practical reformer ; that of Kings-

ley is so restless as to allow him no repose, and sends him rushing, *tête baissée*, at every visible evil or abuse. The one has stirred thousands to bitterest discontent with existing evils and social wrongs, but scarcely erected a finger-post or supplied a motive; the other has roused numbers to buckle on their armour in a holy cause, but has often directed them astray, and has not always been careful either as to banner or to watchword.

Both are fearfully pugnacious; indeed, they are beyond comparison the two most combative writers of their age. Nature sent them into the world full of aggressive propensities; and strong principles, warm hearts, and expansive sympathies, have enlisted these propensities on the side of benevolence and virtue. Happier than many, they have been able to indulge their passions in the cause of right. But their success or good fortune in doing this has led them into the delusion common in such cases. They fancy that the cause consecrates the passion. They feel

“ We have come forth upon the field of life  
To war with evil;”

and once satisfied that it is evil against which they are contending, they let themselves go, and give full swing to all the vehemence of their unregenerate natures. We comprehend the full charms of such a tilt. It must be delightful to array all the energies of the old Adam against the foes of the new. What unspeakable relief and joy for a Christian like Mr Kingsley, whom God has made boiling over with animal eagerness and fierce

aggressive instincts, to feel that he is not called upon to control these instincts, but only to direct them ; and that once having, or fancying that he has, in view a man or an institution that is God's enemy as well as his, he may hate it with a perfect hatred, and go at it *en sabreur* ! Accordingly he reminds us of nothing so much as of a war-horse panting for the battle ; his usual style is marvellously like a neigh—a “ ha ! ha ! among the trumpets ; ” the dust of the combat is to him the breath of life ; and when once, in the plenitude of grace and faith, fairly let loose upon his prey—human, moral, or material—all the Red Indian within him comes to the surface, and he wields his tomahawk with an unbaptized heartiness, slightly heathenish, no doubt, but withal unspeakably refreshing. It is amazing how hard one who is a gladiator by nature strikes when convinced that he is doing God service. Mr Kingsley is a strange mixture of the spirit of the two covenants. He draws his sympathy with human wrongs mainly from the New Testament ; but his mode of dealing with human wrong-doers altogether from the Old. Mr Carlyle borrows little from either division of the Bible ; his onslaughts are like those of one of the northern gods ; he wields Thor's hammer righteously in the main, but with a grim and terrible ferocity, and often mangles his victims as though absolutely intoxicated by the taste of blood.

Both writers—and this is one of their most serious offences—are contemptuous and abusive towards their adversaries far beyond the limits of taste, decency, or

gentlemanly usage. Both indulge in terms of scorn and vituperation such as no cause can justify and no correct or Christian feeling could inspire. Their pages often read like the paragraphs in the Communion Service. Their whole wrath is poured out, as from teeming and exhaustless fountains, on everything they disapprove, and on every one who ventures to differ from them or to argue with them. Since the days of Dean Swift and Johnson there have been no such offenders among the literary men of England. Still, even here, there is a difference; Mr Carlyle slangs like a blaspheming pagan; Mr Kingsley like a denouncing prophet.

Mingled, too, with this unseemly fury, and piercing through all their unmeasured and lacerating language, there is discernible in both men a rich vein of beautiful and pathetic tenderness. This is most marked in Mr Carlyle, as might be expected from his far deeper nature; and if considered in connection with the irritations of an uncomfortable and nervous organisation, goes far to explain, if not to excuse, his outrageous ferocity of utterance. It is as though, like the prophet of old, "he was mad for the sight of his eyes which he saw." Gloomy and phrenetic by temperament; full of enthusiasm for what is noble; keen in his perceptions of what ought to be and might be; bitterly conscious of the contrast with what is; sympathising with almost painful vividness in the sufferings of the unhappy and the wronged, but perversely showing that sympathy rather by contemptuous anger

than by relieving gentleness; richly endowed with warm human affections, which yet he is half ashamed of, and would fain conceal; little accustomed to control himself, and never taught to respect others,—his spirit is in a perpetual state both of internecine and of foreign war; and his tenderness, instead of being like oil upon the troubled waters, seems to be only one more incongruous and fermenting element cast into the seething cauldron. But whenever he will let it beam out unchecked, it not only spreads a rare sunshine over his pages, but communicates at once elevation and sobriety of tone. It is this which makes his *Life of Sterling* far the most pleasant as well as one of the truest of his books.

Mr Kingsley's tenderness is of a different order. Like all his excellences and defects, it springs from his physical temperament; and is therefore manly, prompt, and genuine, but not profound. Indeed, we think the special peculiarity of Mr Kingsley's nature, as of his genius, is that it wants depth. It is as sound as a bell, thoroughly healthy, indescribably vigorous; but, if we must speak our thought, a little superficial. Perhaps it is too healthy to be deep. Still it is very pleasant, because so bubbling, lively, and sincere. We will quote one passage in illustration: it is rather long; but, as we do not intend to quote much, and as it is in his best manner, we will transfer it to our pages.

“Was there no poetry in these Puritans, because they wrote no poetry? We do not mean now the unwritten tragedy of the battle-



psalm and the charge ; but simple idyllic poetry and quiet house-drama, love-poetry of the heart and hearth, and the beauties of every-day human life. Take the most common-place of them : was Zeal-for-Truth Thoresby, of Thoresby Rise in Deeping Fen, because his father had thought fit to give him an ugly and silly name, the less of a noble lad ? Did his name prevent his being six feet high ? Were his shoulders the less broad for it ; his cheeks the less ruddy for it ? He wore his flaxen hair of the same length that every one now wears theirs, instead of letting it hang half-way to his waist in essenced curls ; but was he therefore the less of a true Viking's son, bold-hearted as his sea-roving ancestors, who won the Danelagh by Canute's side, and settled there on Thoresby Rise, to grow wheat and breed horses, generation succeeding generation, in the old moated grange ? He carried a Bible in his jack-boot ; but did that prevent him, as Oliver rode past him with an approving smile on Naseby field, thinking himself a very handsome fellow, with his moustache and imperial, and bright red coat, and cuirass well polished, in spite of many a dint, as he sate his father's great black horse as gracefully and firmly as any long-locked and essenced cavalier in front of him ? Or did it prevent him thinking, too, for a moment, with a throb of the heart, that sweet cousin Patience far away at home, could she but see him, might have the same opinion of him as he had of himself ? Was he the worse for the thought ? He was certainly not the worse for checking it the next instant, with manly shame for letting such " carnal vanities " rise in his heart while he was " doing the Lord's work " in the teeth of death and hell : but was there no poetry in him then ? No poetry in him, five minutes after, as the long rapier swung round his head, redder and redder at every sweep ? We are befooled by names. Call him Crusader instead of Roundhead, and he seems at once (granting him only sincerity, which he had, and that of a right awful kind) as complete a knight-errant as ever watched and prayed, ere putting on his spurs, in fantastic Gothic chapel, beneath " storied windows richly dight." Was there no poetry in him, either, half-an-hour afterwards, as he lay bleeding across the corpse of the gallant horse, waiting for his turn with the surgeon, and fumbled for the Bible in his boot, and tried to hum a psalm, and thought of Cousin Patience, and his father and his mother ; and how they would hear, at least, that he had played the man in Israel that day, and resisted unto blood, striving against sin and the Man of Sin. And was there no poetry in him, too, as he came

wearied along Thoresby dyke, in the quiet autumn eve, home to the house of his forefathers, and saw afar off the knot of tall poplars rising over the broad misty flat, and the one great Abele tossing its sheets of silver in the dying gusts, and knew that they stood before his father's door? Who can tell all the pretty child-memories which flitted across his brain at that sight, and made him forget that he was a wounded cripple? . . . And now he was going home to meet her (Patience) after a mighty victory, a deliverance from Heaven, second only in his eyes to that Red-Sea one. Was there no poetry in his heart at that thought? Did not the glowing sunset, and the reed-beds which it transfigured before him into sheets of golden flame, seem tokens that the glory of God was going before him in his path? Did not the sweet clamour of the wild-fowl, gathering for one rich pæan ere they sank into rest, seem to him as God's bells chiming him home in triumph with peals sweeter and bolder than those of Lincoln or Peterborough steeple-house? Did not the very lapwing, as she tumbled softly wailing before his path, as she did years ago, seem to welcome the wanderer home in the name of Heaven?

“Fair Patience, too, though she was a Puritan, yet did not her cheek flush, her eye grow dim, like any other girl's, as she saw far off the red coat, like a sliding spark of fire, coming slowly along the strait fen-bank, and fled upstairs into her chamber to pray, half that it might be, half that it might not be he? Was there no happy storm of human ears and human laughter when he entered the courtyard gate? Did not the old dog lick his Puritan hand as lovingly as if it had been a Cavalier's? Did not lads and lasses run out shouting? Did not the old yeoman father hug him, weep over him, hold him at arm's length, and hug him again as heartily as any other John Bull, even though the next moment he called all to kneel down and thank Him who had sent his boy home again, after bestowing on him the grace to bind kings in chains, and nobles with links of iron, and contend to death for the faith delivered to the saints? And did not Zeal-for-Truth look about as wistfully for Patience as any other man would have done, longing to see her, yet not daring even to ask for her? And when she came down at last, was she the less lovely in his eyes because she came, not flaunting with bare bosom, in tawdry finery and paint, but shrouded close in coif and pinner, hiding from all the world beauty which was there still, but was meant for one alone, and that only if God willed, in God's good time? And was there

no faltering of their voices, no light in their eyes, no trembling pressure of their hands, which said more and was more, ay and more beautiful in the sight of Him who made them, than all Herrick's Dianemes, Waller's Saccharissas, flames, darts, posies, love-knots, anagrams, and the rest of the insincere cant of the court? What if Zeal-for-Truth had never strung two rhymes together in his life? Did not his heart go for inspiration to a loftier Helicon, when it whispered to itself, "My love, my dove, my undefiled, is but one," than if he had filled pages with sonnets about Venuses and Cupids, love-sick shepherds and cruel nymphs?

"And was there no poetry, true idyllic poetry, as of Longfellow's *Evangeline* itself, in that trip round the old farm next morning, when Zeal-for-truth, after looking over every heifer, and peeping into every sty, would needs canter down by his father's side to the horse fen, with his arm in a sling; while the partridges whirred up before them, and the lurchers flashed like grey snakes after the hare, and the colts came winnying round with staring eyes and streaming manes; and the two chatted on in the same sober business-like English tone, alternately of "the Lord's great dealings" by General Cromwell, the pride of all honest fen-men, and the price of troop-horses at the next Horncastle fair?

"Poetry in those old Puritans? Why not? They were men of like passions with ourselves. They loved, they married, they brought up children; they feared, they sinned, they sorrowed, they fought, they conquered. There was poetry enough in them, be sure, though they acted it like men instead of singing it like birds."

Again, both men are heartily and instinctively religious; yet both incessantly grate against the religious feelings of reverent Christians, though in a different manner, and from different causes. The one is full of reverence, but has no fixed or definite belief; the other is orthodox enough in doctrine, but does not know what reverence means. The one has no creed; the other has no doubt. Mr Carlyle—as all deep and great spirits must—approaches the high mysteries of the Infinite and the Eternal with

awe unspeakable, and almost with humility. He dares not even define the Illimitable Agencies; he always speaks of them in the plural number. You cannot tell what he means precisely when he whispers of the Silences and the Immensities—probably he could not tell himself; but there is no mistaking the natural tone and sentiment with which man refers to something supremely and incomprehensibly above him. There may be no distinct Being for whom this awe is felt, but the awe is unquestionably there. In Mr Kingsley there is nothing of all this. The great creative and pervading Spirit of the universe, who for Mr Carlyle is *l'Être Suprême*, for Mr Kingsley is simply *le bon Dieu*. He is not a stricken mortal, prostrate before the Ineffable Intelligence, but a workman of God, a soldier of Christ, a messenger who has got his orders from his immediate superior, and will execute them like a faithful labourer. He knows God's will, and it always harmonizes strangely with Mr Kingsley's objects and opinions. He has an unquestioning obedience, cheerful service, boundless devotion, to his Father who is in heaven; but of what we call reverence,—hushed and breathless adoration, solemn sense of infinite depth and infinite littleness,—we can perceive no trace whatever. He seems as unconscious as the infant Samuel of a superior Presence. His feelings towards God appear to hover between those of the negro and the Israelite, or rather to partake of both. He speaks of Him and to Him with the simple directness, the confiding but not disrespectful familiarity, now of Moses

and now of Uncle Tom. When he issues his commands to the world of sinners, it is as though he had just come from an interview with the Most High on Sinai. When he prays, it is (to use Mrs Stowe's language) as though he knew God was listening behind the curtain. He is unpleasantly fond of introducing the Great Name on all occasions: it is always "God's work," "God's feasts," "God's heroes," "God's bells," "Good news of God;" expressions which, just and fitting enough when sparingly, solemnly, and appropriately used, produce almost a profane effect by their incessant and uncalled-for recurrence; appear to be dictated chiefly by an appetite for strong language operating on a gentleman in orders; and are, in fact, we believe, Mr Kingsley's way of swearing. ✓

There are further points of resemblance between the two men still. Roaming through our world of complicated and corrupt civilization, laying about them with an iron flail, and smashing shams, follies, and abuses with little mercy and less discrimination, they have yet both their weak places and their blind sides. Iconoclasts as they are, they are idolaters also,—and idolaters of the worst sort, and at the coarsest shrine. These teachers of mankind in an age of advanced science and refinement, trained in the highest culture, rich in the noblest endowments,—

"These, the heirs of all the ages, in the foremost files of time,—"  
worship much as the barbarians of old did, and much as the savages do now, and fall prostrate before brute Force and a tyrannous and unrelenting Will. They

are "Titanolaters," as Archdeacon Hare appropriately named them. Mr Carlyle raves about "Jarls" and "Vikings," and the "grand old Norsemen," till we are sick of the recurring cant; and Mr Kingsley echoes his precise phrases and expressions, page after page, with an almost parrot-like exactitude of iteration. This idolatry of mere strength, however, assumes distinct forms in the two writers; and, strange to say, it takes a somewhat higher type in the Pagan than in the Christian votary. The one idolizes chiefly strength of purpose, the other chiefly strength of muscle and of nerve. Both probably have "gone in" for their own especial line of superiority. Mr Carlyle—never strong in health or agile in frame, nor trained either as ploughman, sportsman, soldier, or athlete, but having had to fight his way in life with a persistent energy and a self-denying power which do him infinite honour—thinks little of mere bodily strength, and, indeed, seldom speaks of the animal frame at all, but feels an irresistible attraction towards inflexible tempers and over-mastering volitions. Indeed, he is essentially and consistently a despot; and with all despots, if only they be relentless and inconsiderate enough, he has a prompt and abounding sympathy. If they be utterly brutal in addition, there are no limits to his admiration. His heart yearns to them, and leaps up to meet them as to brethren. He calls them "MEN," "true men," "types of real manhood." No one acquainted with Mr Carlyle's writings will, we are sure, charge us with one shade of exaggeration.

Every book, and almost every page, will witness for us. The fierce rough Danton was amongst his earliest idols, bloody and ignorant as he was, because he was simple and earnest, knew what he wanted (or thought he did), and went with Juggernaut directness and recklessness to his end. Samuel Johnson too—noble old bear that he was—Mr Carlyle really loves for his unendurable brutality. But it was not till he met with Frederick-William of Prussia, —probably the most truculent ruffian that ever sat upon a modern throne ; an absolute savage in taste and temper ; often half mad, and constantly quite drunk ; for ever and in every relation of life trampling upon justice, decency, kindness, and natural affection,—that Mr Carlyle recognized the “realized ideal” of his fancy, and hugged the “just man made perfect” to his heart of hearts.

But Mr Carlyle not only worships “forcible” men ; he would apply force—physical force—to all recalctrants ; he would govern the world by force. The wise and powerful must rule ; the ignorant and foolish must submit. The scourge and the sword must carry out the dicta which Mr Carlyle sees to be good. The negro must be flogged into sugar-making ; the wandering and misguided multitudes of all lands must be “regimented” under “captains of industry,” who will *compel* them to their task. The same offensive disregard of the rights of individual humanity, the same contempt for freedom, the same exaggeration of its mischiefs, the same denial or unconsciousness of its benefits, runs through his works, and mars the beauty

and the value of them all. Truly, the despots of the world—whether priests, legitimate tyrants, or military usurpers—never before among literary celebrities had an apologist or an adorer like the philosopher of Chelsea.

Mr Kingsley's idolatry of power shows itself in a different fashion, prompted no doubt by his different organization, and somewhat more befitting his clerical profession. He himself is endowed by nature with a vigorous and exuberant organization, is a sportsman, a fox-hunter, an athlete, and would probably have been a gladiator if he had not been a Christian. He revels in the description of every species of athletic exercise and desperate strife. Accordingly all his heroes are men of surpassing animal strength, all bone and muscle, marvels of agility, boiling over with exulting and abounding life, and usually miracles of physical beauty likewise. They are constantly "models;" and very often "young Antinouses," or "Phœbus Apollos." He loves above all things to paint, and to display in action, his ideal of the perfect "animal man." Softness and feebleness he cannot abide. The perpetual moral of his writings, which crops out at every sentence, is the old sentiment,

"To be weak is miserable,  
Doing or suffering."

He does not, like Mr Carlyle, bow down in reverence before Might when utterly divorced from Right. But it is impossible not to perceive that admiration for what is strong *as* strong, is about his most vivid



original instinct. With all his Christian feelings, his varnish of modern civilization, his noble aspirations, and all the intense philanthropies of his heart, Mr Kingsley, beneath the skin, is something of a Goth, a Pagan, and a school-boy still.

Finally, and not to weary our readers further with this prolonged parallel between the two most picturesque and graphic writers of the day, one other guilty similarity remains to be denounced. Both are declaimers—not reasoners. Their declamation is always powerful, often splendid; rich with gorgeous imagery; full of lightning gleams—sometimes lengthening out into steady rays—of grand and saving truths; frequently, usually perhaps, flashing forth in the cause of humanity and right; often striking the real offender and the real sin, often proclaiming the true hero and extolling the true virtue; magnificent in its wrath, withering in its scorn: but, after all, only declamation. Neither writer ever *reasons*, in the strict sense of the term. Inspiration supersedes all necessity for the slow and cautious processes by which conscientious mortals of the ordinary stamp must painfully work out truth and light; and both Mr Carlyle and Mr Kingsley believe themselves inspired. The industrious collection and collation of premises, the careful elaboration of conclusions, are beneath them. They despise the inductive process.\* Mr Carlyle hates facts; Mr

\* It is a curious exemplification, that Mr Kingsley has put forth a volume treating of some of the most knotty and awful questions that can occupy the human mind under the perfectly accurate title of *Loose Thoughts for Loose Thinkers*.

Kingsley hates logic. The hatred of both breaks out on all occasions. Their opinions on subjects, their judgments of men, are not formed by reflection, but dictated by sentiment; and therefore the first are constantly unsound, and the second constantly unjust. What they like, what fits into their temperament, *that* they believe, and *that* they praise. What they dislike, what grates upon their tastes, *that* they repudiate and denounce. Their abhorrence of reasoning is heightened by a further peculiarity common to the two. They are singularly *impatient* men. They are too impatient to observe and inquire; too impatient to perpend and reflect; too impatient to entertain doubts and resolve them. They are not *ruminating* animals; they do not chew the cud of thought, they *pounce upon* ideas, catch bright glimpses of them, have them written on their souls as by a flash of light, shoot them flying, wake in the morning and find them there;—but never create, educe, mould, revolve them.

The inevitable consequence of this is, that both men, to a degree wholly unworthy of cultured intellects, are at the mercy of their sympathies and their antipathies. You cannot have better awakeners, nor worse guides. We might cite a thousand illustrations, but two will suffice. Take the treatment which political economy and its votaries receive at their hands. Mr Carlyle and Mr Kingsley—the latter especially—are deeply impressed with the wretched condition of mankind in these islands, and with the vast and irresistible influence which their material well or ill-being

has upon their moral state. In the *Miscellanies*,\* Mr Kingsley states his views on this subject with a breadth and daring which are astounding in a clergyman, but with which we almost unreservedly agree. To make men virtuous, he everywhere proclaims, you must first rescue them from their physical misery. Now, political economy is the science which treats of man's material well-being. It deals with causes, not with symptoms. Discarding the shallow charity which relieves suffering as it arises, and perpetuates and multiplies it by relieving it, political economy searches out and explains the sources of that suffering, and the only receipt for its radical and enduring cure. Eschewing and denouncing the assistance from without, which degrades the labourer, it studies and preaches that knowledge and self-control which elevates and strengthens while it enriches him. Knowing that competence is essential (among the masses at least) to virtue and to progress, its task is to discover and proclaim how that competence is to be won. It is, in a single word, the Science of Philanthropy. Its business is to show how, and how only, Mr Kingsley's object may be attained. Surely the professors of such a science ought to be recognised and welcomed by him as fellow-labourers. He may think their principles at fault; he may think their rules too rigid; he may think their purpose and their means too narrow; but at least he must see that they are doing his work, and aiming at his end. But no; they are exact thinkers,

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\* ii. pp. 332-334.

and Mr Kingsley hates the fetters of exactitude. They are logicians, and believe in logic; Mr Kingsley neither has it, nor has faith in it. They are often dry, stern, and methodical, while Mr Kingsley is impetuous, enthusiastic, and sentimental; and, in these matters at least, he can endure no man who does not wear his livery, speak his language, and go his way. Therefore he denounces them in terms quite as violent, and almost as indecent, as Mr Carlyle. Yet they are both acquainted with economists—with one at least, and he perhaps the chief—whose compassion for the wretched and the astray is as vivid and as genuine as their own, and has often tried hard his allegiance to sound doctrine and scientific truth, and more than once, in our judgment, found it wanting. Unheeding all this, however, and never pausing to master the science they detest, or to respect the thinker whom they know, they have made political economy from the first, and make it still, the object of their fiercest anathemas.

We need not encumber our pages with the sarcasms which disfigure nearly all Mr Carlyle's writings against the "professors of the Dismal Science," "the Gospel according to M'Crowdy," and the like:\* nor should we be disposed to remind our readers of the very unseemly and indefensible language used on the subject by Mr Kingsley in *Cheap Clothes and Nasty*, and in *Alton Locke* (of which we hoped and believed

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\* See *Past and Present*, *Chartism*, and *Latter-day Pamphlets*, passim.

that he had long ago become ashamed), were it not that in his *Miscellanies*, published only yesterday, we came upon a passage in his old manner, which proves too clearly that the shame has been ineffectual, and that the repentance is, to say the least, incomplete. At present Mr Kingsley is wild about sanitary reform; so are we. Well, then, remembering who was the chief originator, and unwearied—if not unwearying—advocate of that great movement, how could he dare to pen and publish this heartless sneer?

“Others again expected, with equal wisdom, the assistance of the political economist [in the work of sanitary reform]. The fact is undeniable, but at the same time inexplicable. What they could have found in the doctrines of most modern political economists which should lead them to believe *that human life would be precious in their eyes* is unknown to the writer of these pages. Those whose bugbear has been over-population, whose motto has been a euphuistic version of

‘The more the merrier, the fewer the better fare,’

*cannot be expected to lend their aid in increasing the population by saving the lives of two-thirds of the children who now die prematurely in our great cities, and so still further overcrowding this unhappy land with those helpless and expensive sources of national poverty—rational human beings in strength and health.’\**

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\* In justice to ourselves, and as a specimen of Mr Kingsley’s style when he comes across his foes, we must give the rest of the passage, though we confess to a feeling almost of disgust as we transcribe his random irony.

“By political economy alone has this faculty [progress and invention] been denied to man. In it alone he is not to conquer nature, but simply to obey her. Let her starve him, make him a slave, a bankrupt, or what not, he must submit, as the savage does to the hail and the lightning. ‘*Laissez-faire*,’ says the ‘*science du neant*,’—the ‘*science de la misère*,’ as it has truly and bitterly been called,—‘*laissez-faire*.’ Analyse economic questions if you will, but beyond analysis you shall not step. Any attempt to raise

It is as useless to argue with Mr Kingsley, when he takes up his parable against economic science, as with Sir A. Alison when he opens out about the currency. But passing over the unscrupulousness of the above onslaught, we cannot help observing that a little reading or a little thought might have shown Mr Kingsley its falsity as well. Does he not know that human life *is* precious in the eyes of political economists,—not perhaps for the same considerations as with him, but precisely because they are wise reasoners and sound calculators? Is he not aware that they deplore that sacrifice of youthful life caused by a neglect of sanitary laws, because it is *wasteful* as well as cruel? They long ago explained and remonstrated against the folly and extravagance of these inchoate and incomplete existences; they repeatedly and seriously called atten-

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political economy to its synthetic stage is to 'break the laws of nature, to fight against facts; *as if facts were not made to be fought against and conquered and put out of the way, whensoever they interfere in the least with the welfare of any human being.* [Strange jumble and confusion between *facts* and *truths*, principles and laws.] The drowning man is not to strike out for his life, lest by keeping his head above water he interferes with the laws of gravitation. Not that the political economist, or any man, can be true to his own fallacy. He must needs try his hand at the synthetic method, though he forbids it to the rest of the world. But the only deductive hint which he has as yet given to mankind is, quaintly enough, the most unnatural 'eidolon specus' which ever entered into the head of a dehumanised pedant—namely, that once famous 'preventive check,' which—if ever a nation did apply it, as it never will—could issue, as every doctor knows, in nothing less than the questionable habits of abortion, child-murder, and unnatural crime."—*Miscellanies* i. 116.

It is difficult to say whether the rattling nonsense or the unseemly insinuations of this passage are the more repellent.

tion to the fact that, to take no higher ground,—for, be it remembered, *in their profession* they are men of science, and not moralists,—every child that was not reared to manhood was a drain upon the national wealth, a source of unrepaid expenditure, an investment of toil and money which yielded no return—a consumer only, and a producer never. They condemned the costly folly of letting children die before they reached the labouring and remunerating age (or bringing them into the world so that they must so die), on the same principles as they would condemn the analogous insanity of trampling down your green corn, or building houses and then letting them fall to pieces before you finished them; because, *from the point of view at which they were then dealing with the subject*, the cases were alike, inasmuch as both were idle and wasteful preparations for a result that was never to arrive—planting a tree that was never to bear fruit. In technical language, both were instances of “unproductive expenditure.”

The same servitude to impressions and antipathies which makes Mr Kingsley so unjust to unwelcome doctrines, makes him also unjust to alien men. We cannot have a better illustration than his comments on Shelley and Byron, republished in his *Miscellanies* (i. p. 310). His attack upon the former seems to us utterly unwarrantable. Byron, amid all his fearful sins was a “MAN:” he was gifted with indomitable energy and courage; he excelled in all bodily exercise of which his lameness allowed him to partake—she

swam, boxed, rode, shot, to perfection ; was vehement, impetuous, daring, and above all, combative ; a child of impulses, many of them noble and sane, all of them natural and vigorous : and therefore he was, except in his excesses and his sins, a man after Mr Kingsley's own heart. Though his nature was intensely worldly, Byron too was, or fancied himself, a sort of Christian ; while Shelley, whose nature was essentially, though waywardly, religious, was, and proclaimed himself, an unbeliever. Poor Shelley—gentle, tender, ethereal and aspiring, sober and abstemious, a pale student, an abstract and highly metaphysical thinker, delicate as a woman in his organization, sensitive as a woman in his sympathies, loathing all that was coarse and low with a woman's shrinking, detesting all field-sports as barbarous and brutal,—presented a phase of humanity utterly alien to the rampant and “healthy animalism” of Mr Kingsley's nature. In early life Shelley, habitually the purest and least sensual of men, committed one grievous fault, so far as we can judge, less at the instigation of wrong passions than under the delusion of a false theory. In early life, too, when wild and flighty almost to the verge of insanity, if not sometimes beyond it,—when smarting under bitter wrongs, enthusiastic for the regeneration of the world, burning with boyish zeal for the destruction of what he held to be a mischievous and tyrannical delusion, and full of the self-opinion which belongs to youth, and not unfrequently survives it,—he poured forth mad anathemas against Christianity and social law. It



availed nothing that he denounced unnatural and ascetic priests with a pertinacious eloquence akin to Mr Kingsley's own; that his purse, his time, his strength, were always at the call of the suffering and the sad; that his blood boiled as fiercely as that of the strongest at the bare idea of injustice and oppression, and that in such a cause he was as brave as a lion, and would take any odds; that he exercised over the coarser mind of Byron a strange influence which, if not intellectually wholesome, was always morally improving; and that he persuaded him to abstain for a time from continuing his profligate poem;—all this goes for nothing: the one poet was sympathetic, the other antipathetic to Mr Kingsley's tastes; and accordingly, Shelley, whose life, we believe (except in the one instance referred to), was strictly chaste, and whose pages are as pure as Mr Kingsley's own,—for he, like Shelley, sometimes errs in saying things better left unsaid, and like Shelley, too, errs from mistaken theory, and not from wrong design,—Shelley is “lewd” and a “satyr.” “Byron may be brutal, but he never cants;”—“if Byron sinned more desperately and more flagrantly, it was done under the temptations of rank, wealth, disappointed love, and the impulses of an animal nature, to which Shelley's passions were

‘As moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.’”

To Shelley, therefore, is attributed the “lewdness of the gentle and sensitive vegetarian;” and Byron is “the sturdy peer, proud of his bull neck and his box-

ing, who kept bears and bull-dogs, and drilled Greek ruffians at Missolonghi, and 'had no objection to a pot of beer;' and who might, if he had been reformed, have made a gallant English gentleman: while Shelley, if once his intense self-opinion had deserted him, would probably have ended in Rome as an Oratorian or a Passionist."\*

A more characteristic passage—one more richly redolent of unregenerate Kingsleianism—it would be difficult to find. It suggests, too, another criticism we have to make upon our author,—the close connection, namely, of his greatest merits and his greatest faults with the intensely *social* character of his mind. His test, not only of good and evil, but of truth and falsehood, may be said to be the tendency of actions or doctrines to dissolve the bonds of social unity, or to draw them closer. This perhaps lies at the root of his dislike to political economy. Competition—which political economy recognizes as the law of trade—he sees, truly enough, to be the source of much selfishness, many jealousies, and occasionally of bitter animosities

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\* It is singular that, a few pages further on, we find Mr Kingsley speaking of Shelley in almost the precise terms in which we have spoken of himself. "Whether it be vegetarianism or liberty, the rule [with Shelley] is practically the same—sentiment; which in this case, as in the case of all sentimentalist, turns out to mean at last, not the sentiments of mankind in general, but the private sentiments of the writer. This is Shelley; a sentimentalist pure and simple; incapable of anything like inductive reasoning, unable to take cognisance of any facts but those which please his taste, or to draw any conclusion from them but such as also pleases his taste" (p. 314).

and heart-burnings ; and hence he tries to sweep the whole system away with the strong wind of religious faith. His deep respect for sanitary laws, for bodily exercises, for field-sports, is in a great measure due to the connection of these things with *social* health, and the effect they have in clearing away the secret morbidness of exclusive temperaments, and opening the communications between mind and mind. He knows well that there is scarcely any root of exclusiveness, of moral cowardice, of self-involvement, of social blight, so common as the neglect of physical health and exercise ; and he is aware, too, that the social and buoyant tone of his own Christianity arises in a great measure from his building it up on a sound foundation of physical health. There are evidently few things he hates so much as the morbid fancifulness of solitary and sedentary minds.

But this *social* test of right and truth, sound enough as far as it goes, is, *more consuetudo*, so exaggerated by Mr Kingsley that it often brings out very false results. It is true that there must be a seed of error and of poison in any mind, or in any system of belief, which leads permanently to isolation, narrowness, and frigid self-sufficiency. But it is not true—as Mr Kingsley thinks—that the characteristic sins of social temperaments are less heinous or less dangerous than the characteristic sins of solitary temperaments ; nor even that convictions which *for a time* may seem to sever men from their fellow-creatures, and to remove them painfully from human sympathy, are less true than

those which give an immediate and commanding hold of the popular mind. Now Mr Kingsley falls into both these errors. In that essay on Shelley and Byron to which we have just referred, the man of social temperament, of unbridled passions and of unbridled selfishness, is contrasted with a man whose complex, benevolent, sensitive, but in several points unhealthy, spirit was of such a kind that few could understand him fully, and few were fully understood by him. That the one was morbid, and the other manly, we do not deny; but we cannot conceive how any just minded moralist, who judged by a true test—or indeed, by any standard at all other than his own self will and predilections—could compare Byron with Shelley, and feel inclined to give judgment in favour of the hardy reprobate over the gentle and aspiring enthusiast. But what Mr Kingsley feels so strongly is, that Byron's sins against the social bond, though deep and gross, were *open* and easily exposed; Shelley's life and poetry, on the other hand, he thinks likely to fascinate men with an appearance of beauty and nobility which will end in eating out the manliness of their life and the heart of their faith. It is possible enough perhaps, that a Shelley *school* of thought—though not half so likely to become prevalent—might, if prevalent, be more evil in its influences than a Byronic school, because it would be a more complex and subtle combination of noble sentiments with emotional self-indulgence. But what right have we, in comparing the two men, to judge them by the probable effects upon

society of their characteristic faults? The fact remains, that Shelley—though afflicted with a morbid and un-social nature, which, however, he did much to elevate and purify—was self-controlled, benevolent, dignified, courageously true, and comparatively pure in life; while Byron was selfish, sensual, covetous of fame, not above dissimulation, and without the power of mastering himself. Yet the Christian minister prefers the strong *fast* sinner to the erroneous and antipathic thinker.

But Mr Kingsley not only makes social influence a test of good and evil; he too much inclines to make it a test of *Truth* also. In the dialogue of *Phaethon*—a book, by the way, which if a man wishes to fill his belly with the east wind (as Solomon says), he had better read to-morrow—he is not ashamed to assert that a man who has reached what he is convinced is positive truth, should suppress the expression of that conviction if it seems to be in conflict with (what Mr Kingsley, we suppose, deems to be) the more happy and useful belief of society at large. The atheist, we are told, even if moved by the “Spirit of Truth,” is bound to conceal his unbelief;

“for there would be far more chance that he alone was wrong, and the many right, than that the many were wrong, and he alone right. He would, therefore, commit an insolent and conceited action, and moreover, a cruel and shameless one; for he would certainly make miserable, were he believed, the hearts of many virtuous persons who had never harmed him, for no immediate or demonstrable purpose except that of pleasing his own self-will”—(p. 41).

This is perhaps the worst instance to be found in Mr Kingsley's writings of his indiscriminating worship of the social bond. If he had given himself time to think, or had asked any *reasoning* friend to think for him, he would scarcely have published such a passage; or, indeed, any portion of the slipshod volume which contains it. No doubt, *in the end*, any creed must be false, or must contain a large element of error, which tends to drive men asunder; and all true faith ought ultimately to draw them into closer union and harmony. But this is not, and cannot be, our main *test* of their truth; and those who make it so commit exactly the same mistake as the utilitarian moralist, who judges of moral actions only by their consequences. Deep conviction is the sole *sine quá non* of the duty of public expression. Of course no man is bound, and no man has a right, to throw forth to the world his crude, hasty, passing notions on serious subjects—especially if those notions are likely to prove perturbing or offensive, and if he has not qualified himself by years, by study, by patient inquiry, and by modest reflection, to form and to propound independent opinions: and Mr Kingsley might take this lesson home. But the mature convictions of mature minds are the great instruments of social progress and purification: all who read history know them to be so: all who believe in God should feel them to be so likewise; and should beware lest, out of mere timid unfaithfulness of soul, they “quench the spirit,” and fight against the suggestions of the Most High.

As in the few pages which remain of our allotted space we shall address our criticisms to Mr Kingsley alone, we should be sorry to leave our readers under the impression that what we have said of his analogue, Mr Carlyle, comprises our whole opinion of that eminent man, or at all faithfully conveys the sentiments with which we regard him. We have spoken of his faults freely and severely ; and we have nothing more to add on that score. But Mr Carlyle is a man to be spoken of with respect, even where we cannot speak of him with patience. The present age owes to few a deeper debt of gratitude. He has infused into it something of his own uncompromising earnestness. He has preached up the duty and the dignity of WORK, with an eloquence which has often made the idle shake off their idleness, and the frivolous feel ashamed of their frivolity. He has proclaimed, in tones that have stirred many hearts, that in toil, however humble, if honest and hearty, lie our true worth and felicity here below. "Blessed is the man who has found his work," he somewhere says : "let him ask no other blessedness." He has inspired in others something of his own contempt for animal indulgence, and for unproductive and un aspiring ease. He is the most terrible scourge the *fruges consumere nati* ever had. For everything unreal and deceptive he has a keen eye and a withering denunciation. He has broken in pieces many hollow idols, and scattered to the winds many empty pretensions, many time-honoured falsehoods, many half-held creeds. He has forced a conventional and

shallow generation to test and try many things, and to abandon what has clearly been found wanting. If he has built up little, he has destroyed much ; he has prepared the way for future workmen by removing vast heaps of encumbering rubbish. On thinkers and on the young he has exercised an influence which has always been remarkable, and generally salutary ! and if he has been usually scouted and neglected by statesmen and politicians, by the practical and the sober-minded, he owes it to his inveterate habit—in which again, by the way, Mr Kingsley resembles him—of stating truth with such outrageous exaggeration that it looks like falsehood, and almost becomes such.

We have two more criticisms to make on Mr Kingsley's writings ; and both relate to very grave faults. With faculties equal to turning out work of almost any degree of excellence, his ordinary style of workmanship is slovenly and slipshod. With power to reach almost any standard, his ordinary standard is unfixed and low. He, who can do so well, is content often to do ill. We are sure that he writes as he thinks, hastily and inconsiderately. His rattling, random, galloping, defiant style irresistibly conveys the impression of a man of overflowing mind coming in from a breathless burst with the fox-hounds, rushing to his desk with muddy boots, battered hat, and disordered dress, and dashing off with vast rapidity the teeming fancies suggested to him by a brisk circulation and a fertile and vivid brain. He is essentially



an *improvisatore*—an extempore writer. His luxuriance is marvellous; but he never prunes or tones it down. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, conscious of his own great gifts, he thinks that his loosest and most careless thoughts are good enough for the world. He wants respect for his readers, for his art, and for his own powers. He does not value the talent God has given him sufficiently to cultivate it to its highest point of perfection, to dress it in the most fitting drapery, or to be on the watch against its straggling vagaries. He has none of the noble, artistic, old Greek thirst for perfection. He “goes in” for quantity rather than quality. Content with, and revelling in, a prolific exuberance that is almost unrivalled; seeking to do much rather than to do well; trusting to inspiration, and fancying (perhaps too easily) that whatever comes must be inspired,—he is for ever falling below himself, and at once disappointing and irritating his admirers. Now, a genius like Mr Kingsley’s not only deserves the most sedulous culture, but demands the most severe control. It is too rich and teeming to be left to “wander at its own sweet will.” It needs to be *employed*, not to be *indulged*. A man has no more right to allow his powers to be *less* useful and profitable than they might be made, than he has to misuse or to neglect them altogether. If it be sinful to wrap your talent in a napkin and hide it in the earth, it is only one degree less sinful so to handle it as to make it yield twofold only where it might yield ten.

We have said that Mr Kingsley is essentially an *improvisatore*. His novels especially bear the same relation to the best works of art, in their line, that the extempore versification of an abounding fancy bears to the conscientiously perfected and polished production of a consummate poet. It is difficult to believe that, either in *Hypatia* or in *Two Years ago*, he had laid his plot beforehand: in *Yeast* there does not pretend to be any plot at all. *Hypatia* especially might have been so grand, and is so disappointing. There is consummate mastery of the costume and character of the epoch; there are magnificent materials of character and fancy brought together to the workshop; there are gorgeous descriptions of external beauty; there are individual scenes of thrilling interest; there are wonderful glimpses both of thought and passion. Raphael Aben Ezra's meditations when he gets to the "bottom of the abyss" of scepticism, and poor Pelagia's piercing remonstrances against the prospect of being consigned to the flames of hell for ever, are among the most powerful passages we have read in any language. But the inconsiderate confusion in which the incidents of the story jostle and stumble over one another, and the indistinctness with which many of them are told, compel us to reserve our admiration for particular scenes and portions, and render it impossible to praise the work as a whole. Mingled with our pleasure and our interest in reading it, and spoiling both, come the ever-recurring reflections, "How much more might have been made of

this! how much better this might have been done! what a splendid conception, but what an unworthy and slovenly maltreatment of it!" Still, with all its faults, it is unquestionably a work of genius; but of genius in a hurry—of genius, as it were, shut up without fire or candle, like an inharmonious jury, and compelled to complete its task before it can regain its liberty. The general picture of those times is imperfect and confused enough, not from want of knowledge, but from want of care and patience; the view of the great struggle between Christianity and Paganism, when the latter was an effete and dying unreality, and the former was insolent with rough young life and rampant with incipient victory—which offered so magnificent a subject for a pen competent to deal with it,—is in our opinion most inadequately and mistily worked out; but, on the other hand, the extravagant follies and the brutal vices of the Alexandrian Christians, as well as the narrow bigotry, questionable motives, and unscrupulous violence of their leaders, are drawn with a powerful and unsparing hand. Philammon, the young monk who goes forth to see the world, is interesting and natural; so is the wily and cultivated Jew, first a cynical philosopher, and then a convert to the new religion; so also is Pelagia, the Athenian dancing-girl and courtesan—frivolous, pleasure-loving, and childish, undeveloped and soulless because untaught, unconsciously sinful because brought up to sin, but still endowed with some original elements of good, and therefore redeemable, and in the

end redeemed. Hypatia, the beautiful teacher of a poetic philosophy and a poetic creed; the beautiful dweller in a beautiful cloud-land; the enthusiastic votary of the old gods of Greece; spotless, ethereal, noble, but a dreamer; vainly and wildly striving to save and fan the flickering embers of a fading past, and to brighten and animate with her own vivid life the chill and pallid moonlight of the pagan faith,—is grandly conceived and finely depicted. The other characters in the book seem to us either blotches or mere indicated outlines. The only extract we shall allow ourselves is the soliloquy of Pelagia, after she has been awakened by the denunciations and the pity of Philammon and Arsenius to the sinfulness of her life, and its reputed future issue:

“I cannot bear it! Anything but shame! To have fancied all my life—vain fool that I was!—that every one loved and admired me; and to find that they were despising me, hating me, all along! . . . And yet women as bad as I have been honoured—when they were dead. What was that song I used to sing about Epicharis, who hung herself in the litter, and Leaina, who bit out her tongue, lest torture should drive them to betray their lovers? There used to be a statue of Leaina, they say, at Athens—a lioness without a tongue. . . . And whenever I sang the song, the theatre used to rise and shout, and call them noble and blessed. . . . I never could tell why then; but I know now! Perhaps they may call me noble, after all. At least they may say, “She was a —; but she dared to die for the man she loved!” . . . Ay, but God despises me too and hates me. He will send me to eternal fire. Philammon said so,—though he was my brother. The old monk said so, though he wept as he said it. . . . The flames of hell for ever! Oh, not for ever. Great, dreadful God! not for ever! Indeed, I did not know! No one ever taught me about right and wrong; and I never knew I had been baptized,—indeed I never knew!—And it was so pleasant—so

pleasant to be loved and praised and happy, and to see happy faces round me. How could I help it? The birds who are singing in the darling beloved court—they do what they like; and Thou art not angry with them for being happy. And Thou wilt not be more cruel to me than to them, great God,—for what did I know more than they? Thou hast made the beautiful sunshine, and the pleasant, pleasant world, and the flowers and the birds. Thou wilt not send me to burn for ever and ever? will not a hundred years be punishment enough?—or a thousand? O God, is not this punishment enough already,—to have to leave him just as—just as I am beginning to long to be good and to be worthy of him? . . . Oh! have mercy—mercy—mercy—and let me go after I have been punished enough! Why may I not turn into a bird, or even into a worm, and come back again out of that horrible place, to see the sun shine and the flowers grow once more? Oh, am not I punishing myself already? Will not this help to atone? . . . Yes, I will die!—and perhaps so God will pity me.’ And with trembling hands she drew the sword from the sheath, and covered the blade with kisses. ‘Yes, on this sword—with which he won his battles. That is right—his to the last. Will it be very painful?—After all it is his sword; it will not have the heart to torture me much.”’

Many of the same remarks we have made on *Hypatia* will apply to *Two Years ago*. To us this appears the cleverest and the pleasantest of Mr Kingsley’s novels; but it, like the rest, shows a singular absence of the artistic spirit. The plot is clumsy, and the winding-up and conversion of Tom Thurnall slovenly in the extreme. No man with an eye to the perfection of his work would have interwoven the irrelevant episode of Stangrave and Cordifamma. It is entirely out of place, and is very interrupting. But Mr Kingsley wanted to say his say about slavery and America; he had a fine conception in his head, and some striking thoughts ready to his pen; so he thrust

them in where they had no business, and spoiled one story by what would have afforded excellent materials for another. But the book is full of interest: Grace is charming, though unnatural; Valencia charming, because natural. Thomas Thurnall is a capital character, though here and there degenerating into harsh caricature: a better picture was never drawn of the unregenerate, good, *natural* man,—wild, reckless, worthy, and affectionate,—doing his duty, and doing well, not from any conscientiousness or religious faith, but from a simple, ungodly, innate love of whatever is true, honest, fitting, right, and kindly; self-confiding, bubbling over with animal vigour and animal spirits, very rough but very loveable. The poet too,—vain, selfish, shallow, and unregulated, but honourable and aspiring,—is well conceived, and is a real and complete conception. As with *Hypatia*, we say of this book, “What a pity that what is so good should not have been better still.”

Before closing this paper, we have another of Mr Kingsley's deficiencies to notice (their name is Legion, our readers will begin to think); and it is one somewhat difficult to handle, both from its nature and from its close connection with one of his most signal merits. Without intending it,—or it would be more correct to say, without being conscious of it,—he is not unfrequently coarse. We are aware that he would not admit the imputation, and that he really believes himself to be innocent; but on questions of this sort the common taste of cultivated men and women must

decide. In his treatment of love and the relation between the sexes, while sometimes excellent, he is sometimes also needlessly venturesome and grating. The plain truth is (and we may as well speak out), that his theory on this and cognate subjects, though we incline to think it sound, is one which can only be acted upon safely by writers whose courage and whose feelings are under the guidance of the most sensitively correct taste. He likes to call things by their plain names; a fancy with which, in moderation, we sympathize. He thinks, further, that in treating of the various questions arising out of the relations between the sexes, we lose much and risk much by a mischievous reticence and a false and excessive delicacy; and in this opinion also we agree with him. But in reference to both these peculiarities, his rampancy and daring make him a dangerous ally. He rides so near the boundary, that you are in perpetual uneasiness lest he should pass it. His view of love is, we think, true, chaste, and noble; and much needs to be asserted and upheld. Macaulay somewhere says of Southey, that he had no conception of genuine human love, "that all his heroes made love like seraphim or like cattle." Mr Kingsley's heroes avoid both extremes; he proclaims,—with a courage which, in a clergyman especially, is above all praise—the rights of nature, and the intrinsic purity of natural instincts; he blends, more than any writer we know, the warmth with the nobility of passion, and is resolutely bent on showing that the most passionate love may also be the purest,

if only it be legitimate in its circumstances and worthy in its object. He seems to have almost grasped the grand cardinal truth, that the real guilt lies, not in mingling the gratification of passion with the sentiment of love, but in ever for one moment permitting the former save under the guidance and sanction of the latter. But here again that predominant appreciation of the *physical*, which we have already commented upon, is unpleasantly manifest; the *Saint's Tragedy* contains passages which the more sensitive taste of Mr Kingsley's friend and Mentor\* would have omitted; and in other of his stories, what we may call the "animal magnetism" of love in distinction to its finer sentiment, is made too much of, and brought too prominently forward. The heroines are too sensitive to the influence of look and touch; the heroes win them rather by mesmerism than by courtship. There is an undoubted element of fact in all this; but whether it be wise to paint it so strongly, or to dwell on it so much, may well be questioned.

For the fierce denunciation with which Mr Kingsley assails the brutal ascetics of former times and their puny imitators in our own days, we tender him our most cordial gratitude and admiration. He hates them with a truly holy hatred. Asceticism is the form which religion takes in sensual minds, and in those weaker spirits over whom sensualists sometimes exercise so fatal and degrading a supremacy. When

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\* See the preface, by Mr Maurice.



we think of the holy joys that have been poisoned, of the healthy souls that have been diseased, of the fine natures that have been made coarse, of happy lives embittered and bright lives darkened, of noble minds overset and pure minds soiled, by the foul fancies and the false doctrines which these men have invented to trample upon nature and to outrage all its sweet humanities, we feel that no terms of wrath or condemnation can be too unmeasured to apply to them. The strength and justice of Mr Kingsley's sentiments on this subject would incline us perhaps too readily to pardon the coarseness observable in the *Saint's Tragedy* and in *Hypatia*, were they really necessary for the purpose he has in view, which we do not think they are.

We have spoken freely and without stint of Mr Kingsley's errors and offences, because he is strong and can bear it well ; because he is somewhat pachydermatous, and will not feel it much ; because it is well for a man who habitually speaks of others in such outrageous terms, to have his own measure occasionally meted out to him in return ; because, also, one who sins against so much light and knowledge deserves to be beaten with many stripes ; and because, finally, on a previous occasion we did such ample justice to his merits. But we should grieve to have it believed that we are insensible to his remarkable and varied excellencies, or to part from him otherwise than in a spirit of thorough and cordial appreciation. In spite of much that is rant, and of much that would be twaddle

if it were not so energetic, there is such wonderful "go" in him, such exulting and abounding vigour, and he carries you along with a careering and facile rapidity which, while it puts you out of breath, is yet so strangely exhilarating, that old and young never fail to find pleasure in his pages. He may often wander, but he never sleeps. He has, however, far higher claims on our admiration than any arising from these merely literary merits. And in an age like this, of vehement desires and feeble wills, of so much conventionalism and so little courage,—when our favourite virtue is indulgence to others, and our commonest vice is indulgence to self,—when few things are heartily loved, and fewer still are heartily believed,—when we are slaves to what others think, and wish, and do—slaves to past creeds in which we have no longer faith, slaves to past habits in which we have no longer pleasure, slaves to past phrases from which all the meaning has died out,—when the ablest and tenderest minds are afraid to think deeply because they know not where deep thought might land them, and are afraid to act thoroughly, because they shrink from what thorough action might entail,—when too many lead a life of conscious unworthiness and unreality, because surrounded by evils with which they dare not grapple, and by darkness which they dare not pierce; in such an age, amid such wants and such shortcomings, we owe a deep debt of gratitude to a crusader like Mr Kingsley, whose faith is undoubting, and whose courage is unflinching; who neither fears others

nor mistrusts himself ; who hates with a destructive and aggressive animosity whatever is evil, mean, filthy, weak, hollow, and untrue ; who has drawn his sword and girded up his loins for a work which cannot be passed by, and which must not be negligently done ; whose practice himself, and whose exhortation to others, is, in the words of the great German,

“ Im halben zu entwöhnen,  
Im ganzen, guten, wahren, resolut zu leben.”

## FRENCH FICTION : THE LOWEST DEEP.\*

It is hard to say whether the current politics or the current literature of France convey the more vivid impression of utter and profound demoralization ;—the willing servitude, the craven fear, the thirsty materialism, the absence of all liberal sentiment or noble aspiration, indicated by the one,—the abandonment of all self-control or self-respect, the surrender of all manliness, dignity, or reticence, the hunger after the most diseased, unholy, and extravagant excitement, characteristic of the other,—or the intense and unrebuked selfishness, the passionate and slavish worship of wealth and power, which constitute the basis and the soul of both alike. Of course there are exceptions in literature as in life. But we speak of the prevalent, the almost universal tone ; we speak of the acting, voting, deciding, characterizing mass in the one case, and of the books of the widest circulation, and

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\* *Les Mystères de Paris ; Atar-Gul.* Par Eugène Sue.  
*La Dame aux Camélias ; Le Demi-Monde, un drame ; Le Roman d'une Femme.* Par Alex. Dumas, fils.  
*Monte-Christo.* Par Alex. Dumas, père.  
*Fanny, une étude.* Par Ernest Feydeau.  
*Confessions d'un Eufant du Siècle.* Par Alfred de Musset.  
*Elle et Lui,* par George Sand. *Lui et Elle,* par Paul de Musset  
*Lui,* par Mme. Louise Collet.

the writers of the most popular repute and the most signal success, in the other. In politics there still exist a few men—fewer, alas, each day, as their numbers are thinned by death or by despair—the salt of the earth, but far too scanty to give it savour, the five righteous men, but not enough to save the city,—who mourn over their degradation and resent their shame, who, “rowing hard against the stream,” strive manfully, and strive to the last, to warn their countrymen and to purify and rouse their country.\* But the *national life*, the political aspect of France, is undeniably what we have described it: the vast majority of the people in nearly every class, lost to all sense of personal dignity or public justice, is devoted to the pursuit of wealth and luxury, and ready to acquiesce in any *régime* and to worship any ruler that fosters this pursuit; and questions or kicks against despotism only when, in a momentary aberration of far-sightedness, it touches their immediate purse;—while even the constitutionalists, as they term themselves—the liberal *frondeurs*—are far more angry at us for fraternizing with their despot than with themselves for tolerating and enthroning him, and hate him almost more bitterly for the unintentional aid he has rendered to Italian liberties than for his cynical, perfidious, and sanguinary extinction of their own. So in literature—especially in that branch of it in which alone there is or can be much activity at present, and

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\* Written in 1860.

with which we are now more immediately concerned, the literature of fiction—there are still a few writers who vainly offer to their countrymen from time to time a repast refined in tone and irreproachable in taste and morals;—but the public appetite has been too long and too deeply vitiated to appreciate what is natural and pure, and turns away with a contempt which is almost loathing from dishes unseasoned by the voluptuous, the morbid, or the monstrous. From time to time noble and sound criticism appears in the more respectable reviews and journals, but it is powerless to alter the demand or to arrest the supply of the article the public asks for; the novels which are for the most part popular—the only ones that are run after, the only ones that *pay*, either in fame or money—are exclusively those which pander to the worst passions and the worst taste; till, without exaggeration, it is as rare to find a successful French novel that is not scandalous as an English one that is.

French fiction, always more or less diseased and indecorous, has in recent years passed through several distinct phases of disease, and may now almost be said to have left simple indecorum far behind. Had it continued to exhibit merely its normal features of ordinary license and voluptuousness, there would have been little temptation to approach the subject, and every motive to avoid it. That phase of it has been often enough animadverted upon in English publications; no pleasure could be derived from its contemplation, and no new lessons could be drawn from its

analysis. But since we first began to be acquainted with it, a change, or rather a succession of changes, has come over it, so strange, so repellent, and in some respects so appalling, that some instruction, at least in the way of warning, may be hoped for from studying it in a right spirit; and it presents too marked and too extraordinary a psychological phenomenon to be ignored by any who desire to understand or penetrate the true aspect of their age. No such field was ever offered to the students of moral pathology before.

But in proceeding to treat of it, we are met on the threshold by an inherent and insuperable difficulty. Christian writers who endeavoured to depict the moral renovation which the religion of their great Master wrought in the world, and to deduce thence proofs of its excellence and its divinity, complain that they labour under this disadvantage; that it is impossible for them to paint in true colours and to describe in plain language the horrible demoralization which Christianity cured and purged away, simply because no modern society would tolerate the delineation. They cannot give an adequate conception of the contrast, because they are compelled, out of very decency and mercy, to soften down the darker and more hideous features of the decaying times of Rome, Byzantium, or Alexandria. They cannot make us understand what Christianity *did*, because they dare not tell us nakedly what Paganism *was*. Something of the same embarrassment besets us in dealing with our present subject. We shall have to speak of French fiction without being

able to show thoroughly what it is. We shall have to analyze its elements and its sources without being able adequately to exemplify or prove the correctness of our diagnosis by the most flagrant and conclusive specimens. We shall have to use the strongest language and pronounce the most unmeasured condemnation, while we are precluded by the very nature of the case from justifying the sentence by adducing and detailing before our readers the most heinous of the offences which have called it forth.

There is yet another difficulty. The fact which forms the basis of nearly all the tales and romances on which we shall have to animadvert, is the habitual prevalence in France of those lawless loves, and, worse still, those *liaisons* where no love is, which English fiction is—or used to be—forbidden to describe and almost to allude to. Of course we are too well aware that such things are far from being unknown among ourselves, but at least they have no *recognised* existence: wisely or unwisely, they are usually ignored both in general society and in literature designed for general reading; the novelist may not work them up as a part of his ordinary stock-in-trade; the critic, even if he have an æsthetic or an ethical aim in view, must speak of them only in veiled language and with much periphrasis. In England they are not regarded as legitimate materials for the excitement of interest or the development of character: if the writer of fiction uses them at all, he is obliged to use them with the utmost reticence and moderation; whereas the French



romancer rarely dreams of dispensing with them, and often relies on little else for the construction of his plot or the fascination of his tale. With us all such violations of the moral and the social law meet with the severest and most unqualified condemnation:—long may it continue so, provided only the condemnation be sincere, consistent, and free from all taint of unholy or malignant pharisaism! Among our neighbours a far more lax and lenient view is taken of such transgressions; they are classed among the common and nearly unavoidable frailties of a nature never perfect and seldom strong; in ordinary life and ordinary fiction they call forth only gentle blame, faint regret, and no surprise. This being the case, we must to a certain extent accept, or at least recognise, the point of view of the writers and readers of the society of which we speak; that is to say, without for one moment admitting that their estimate of illicit passion is a just one, we must allow that it *is* the usual and accepted one among them, before we proceed to draw warning and instruction from observing to what lengths this fatal license has conducted the light literature of their country. We have only, as a preliminary, to clear our path by asking our readers to understand, once for all, that, as the normal prevalence of the errors or vices, or frailties in question (however we may choose to designate them), is assumed by all the literature we are about to estimate, it must be assumed likewise by ourselves.

The inspiration of French fiction,—the source from

which flow half its deformities, its vile morality and its vitiated taste, is the *craving for excitement* that has so long been characteristic of the nation. It is not difficult to see how this craving has been stimulated and nourished till it has grown into a passion that will take no denial and knows no satiety. Two generations of ceaseless revolution, of dazzling conquests and bewildering defeats, of alternations of wild frenzy and prostrate depression, of vicissitudes as strange, as rapid, as extreme as any to be witnessed at the gaming-table, have goaded what was always a desire into an imperious necessity. The present race of Frenchmen, and their fathers even more, were born and bred amid scenes and deeds which made the battle of life a confused and desperate *mêlée*, the race of life a feverish scurry, the banquet of life a dish of mere spice, alcohol, and pepper. Glance back for a moment over the first magnificent convulsion of 1789. Call to mind all the stirring and disturbing thoughts of emancipation and of progress which the writers of that day had been diligently instilling into the popular brain, till half-a-century of new ideas acting on five centuries of old oppressions wrought a fermentation which found issue and utterance in such an overthrow of established notions and established things as the world had never witnessed since its birth. Grand and generous dreams of indefinite improvement; fierce and selfish longings for satisfying vengeance; the prospect of a new era; the fancy of a heaven realised on earth; that universal liberation from all bonds, and almost from all obedi-

ence, that sweeping disbelief or doubt as to every settled axiom of religion, of morals, and of law, which is so unhinging even to trained and philosophic minds, and which was then diffused over all the uneducated intelligence and turbulent sensibility of France; the sudden overthrow, nay the actual disappearance, in little more than a year, of the aristocracy, the monarchy, the Church,—of all, in a word, that men had been accustomed to reverence or fear; the king and the noble cast down, the serf and the valet lifted up; the first last, and the last first. Amid excitements so tremendous as these, what simple or quiet tastes could grow up or survive? After stimulants like these, how could the relish for a pure milk-diet be recovered? Then followed reaction and disenchantment as extreme as the wild hopes which they replaced,—the guillotine, the prison massacres, the Reign of Terror; and to the excitement of passionate aspirations succeeded the more absorbing and degrading excitement of a deadly fear. No one who has not studied that terrible period in detail can form an idea of the depth to which its influence penetrated into the national life. Simultaneously with this phase, but prolonged beyond it, came the marvellous victories of the half-clad, half-disciplined troops, poured forth to the frontiers by the Convention and the Directory; followed by the early and brilliant conquests of the young Napoleon, when every post brought tidings of some new achievement; and terminated by the *coup-de-main* which made him supreme ruler of an exhausted and admiring nation.

For a while there was comparative quiet, as the work of reconstruction succeeded that of abolition. But, as if ten years of such convulsions had not sufficed to demoralise the nation, they were to be continued and crowned by fourteen years of another sort of feverish excitement, different, indeed, but almost more disturbing. In this point of view, as in most others, the reign of Napoleon was an irreparable mischief to his country. His triumphal march over Europe—so rapid, so resistless, and so sure, that every month seemed barren, dull, and idle that did not inaugurate a new victory and annex a new realm—made all sober careers stupid and monotonous. Years spent in feverish expectation and in frantic jubilee demoralise the rest of life. The Russian campaign, the European coalition, the desperate struggle of 1813, the abdication, the almost fabulous recovery, the final catastrophe of Waterloo and St Helena, kept up and enhanced the mad excitement. Henceforward tame and ordinary existence became unendurable to Frenchmen, except during brief moments of absolute exhaustion; and the revolution of 1830, the republic of 1848, the terrible days of June, the *coup-d'état*, and the second empire, seemed natural and normal occurrences in such a history,—the inevitable sequels of such a turbulent and stormy past.

Infancy, youth, and manhood spent among scenes like these leave indelible traces on a people's life. The whole soil of the national character is stamped and interpenetrated by the overmastering influences;

and it may be said, in a far nobler sense than that originally intended by the poet, that

“Where such fairies once have danced  
No grass will ever grow.”

The operation on literature is twofold: in the first place, readers find any less stirring incidents or less violent emotions feeble, tame, and unexciting; and in the second place, writers find in the familiar realities of their annals, in the thrilling crisis and the terrible catastrophes from which the country has but just emerged, and in the thousand individual histories and adventures mixed up with them, a quarry of materials for romance with which, richness and effectiveness, no common fiction can compare, and which the most bold and fertile invention would find it difficult to match. The same circumstances enabled the authors to supply without stint or measure what they have educated the audience imperiously to require. Accordingly this teeming mine has been assiduously worked by the novelists of France; and the national craving for stimulants has thus been fed and fostered without being quenched or cured—for that sort of thirst is never slaked. The time came when even stories seasoned with all the quick convulsions and lurid horrors of the revolution and the Reign of Terror began to pall. The demand remained. Something fresh and something stronger must be contrived to meet it. The unhealthy appetite—ravenous because unhealthy—became clamorous for more; like the voluptuous despot, it offered a reward

for a new sensation, a new pleasure, a new dish ; and, as in that case, since the genuine and the natural was exhausted, the monstrous and the impure must be resorted to.

The first mine worked was, as might be expected, the *licentious*. Voluptuous pictures of illicit love, in all its phases and in all its stages of progress, constantly approaching the limits of decency, and often overstepping them, offered at once the most natural and the most vulgar source of excitement for the jaded appetite and the perverted taste. Every one could understand them ; every one could take an interest in them. Descriptions of a sin—the sin being forbidden by good morals, and the description of it being forbidden by good society—presented all the attractions of a double lawlessness, in addition to their native charm. But these were so easy and became so common, the ordinary forms of them were so soon exhausted and so certainly and rapidly palled by repetition, and the boundaries of the permissible were so soon reached, that success could only be achieved by something that was extraordinary and therefore bordered on the unnatural, by something that was unpermissible and therefore degenerated into the atrocious and revolting. Each writer had to surpass his predecessor,—to say something still more shocking, to conceive something still more shameful, to push daring a few steps further, to raise the drapery of delicacy and decorum a few inches higher, to uncover the nakedness of poor humanity a little more completely

and a little more offensively. The consequences may easily be fancied ; in a race of this sort there is no absolute goal, or rather the goal is perpetually receding ; but the rival candidates run very fast and very far.

Nearly all the French novelists of the present generation have been habitually and flagrantly guilty in this respect ; but perhaps the most distinctive example of this phase of mental and moral unhealthiness may be seen in the earlier tales of George Sand, who is the type, though not the chief, of sinners. No writer, so capable of painting the sentiment, has stained her pages more deeply with pictures of the appetite of love. With a style which for poetry and beauty, and affluence in all the brightest colouring of nature, has had no equal since Rousseau, she has dedicated it to the production of scenes which Rousseau would have despised as an artist and shrunk from as a moralist. For a brief space she seemed about to emerge from the mire, and to be pruning and cleaning her wings for higher flights and for a purer air ; and *Consuelo* and *La Petite Fadette* were the result of this excursion into good ; but she has relapsed again, and *Indiana*, *Valentine*, and *Léone Léoni*, still remain as the most native productions of her genius, and the best specimens of the literary vice we are describing. Of course we can give no quotations, nor should we have dwelt upon the subject at all except as the first step towards the frightful degree of disease which French fiction has now reached.

After a while, however, this species of stimulant began to pall, and a new spice was introduced. The melodramatic and the horrible were superadded to the voluptuous. But the *merely* horrible would have been trite and powerless. Murders, suicides, torture-chambers, and scaffolds, were exhausted and dried up as sources of excitement, unless some fresh element could be infused, or some change rung upon the wearied chord. This was found in the *prolongation* of the horror,—in the indefinite tension of the strained nerve. Pain, terror, anguish, struggle,—commonplace and endurable when lasting only a few moments,—began to *tell* when continued through whole pages, and spun out through frightful and breathless hours. The author in whose writings this peculiar type of excitement most frequently recurs is Victor Hugo. He has worked this mine through its every vein with unrelenting industry. In *Bug-Jargal* he gives us a scene wherein the hero, a captive and disarmed, is left at the edge of a fearful chasm with his mortal enemy, a deformed and malignant negro dwarf, who is preparing to slay him ; but who, before doing so, reviles and taunts him through a whole chapter. After a rescue and relapse, they are again alone : the dwarf rushes upon his victim, D'Auverney, with a poniard ; D'Auverney slips aside, and the dwarf falls into the abyss. To have ended matters here, however, would have been a waste of valuable materials. Accordingly the author proceeds :

“I told you that a root of the old tree projected from a crevice in the granite rock, just above the margin of the chasm. The



dwarf encountered this in his fall ; his tunic caught in the root, and seizing hold of this last support, he clung to it with extraordinary energy. His pointed cap fell off his head ; he let go his poniard, which was lost in the depths of the abyss. Suspended thus over the horrible gulf, Habibrah made convulsive efforts to regain the platform ; but his short arms were unable to reach the edge of the escarpment, and his nails were torn in his impotent exertions to lay hold on the slippery surface of the overhanging rock. He howled with rage.

“The least shake on my part would have sufficed to have precipitated him into the roaring chasm ; but the idea of such a cowardly act never crossed my mind. This moderation seemed to strike him. I thanked Heaven for my unhoped-for deliverance, and prepared to abandon him to the fate he so richly merited, when I heard his voice, wretched and imploring, calling to me from the gulf.

“ ‘ Master, master ! ’ he said, ‘ for pity’s sake don’t go ! In the name of the good God, don’t leave a guilty and impenitent wretch, whom you can save, to die this miserable death ! Alas, my strength is failing, the branch slips and yields under my hands ; my weight is dragging me down ; in an instant I shall lose my grasp, and the horrible abyss is raging beneath me. Have you no mercy on your poor dwarf ? Won’t you prove to him that white men are better than black, and masters more generous than slaves ? ’

“ I was moved, and returned to the edge of the precipice : the dim light as I looked down, showed me the hideous face of the negro, with an expression of entreaty and agonised distress which I had never seen there before.

“ ‘ Senor Leopold, ’ he continued, encouraged by the pity which I could not altogether hide, ‘ is it possible that a man can see a fellow-creature in this frightful situation and not help him ? Master ! stretch me out a hand—so little will save me ; and what is nothing to you is everything to me. Drag me up, for pity’s sake, and my gratitude shall be equal to my crimes ! ’

“ ‘ Wretch ! ’ I exclaimed, ‘ recall not the recollection of them I warn you. ’

“ ‘ If I do it is only to detest them. Oh, be more generous than I was ! O Heaven, I am failing ! I am going ! Give me your hand—your hand, in the name of the mother who bore you. ’

“ I cannot describe how lamentable and *déshirant* was this cry

of terror and of suffering. I forgot all that had passed, and saw in him no longer an enemy, a traitor, an assassin, but only a wretch whom a slight exertion of mine could rescue from a dreadful death. He begged so piteously, and reproach would have been so idle! I bent down, and kneeling on the edge of the chasm, with one arm round the tree of which the root half sustained the miserable Habibrah, I stretched down to him the other. He seized it with prodigious strength in both of his; but far from using it to endeavour to ascend, I felt that he was seeking to drag me with him into the gulf; and but for the support of the tree to which I was clinging, I should have been infallibly overpowered by the sudden and violent pull which the wretch gave me.

“ ‘Villain!’ I exclaimed, ‘what are you about?’

“ ‘I am avenging myself,’ he replied, with an infernal burst of laughter. ‘Imbecile animal! I have you fast; you have given yourself to me. I was lost; you were saved:—you have been ass enough to venture voluntarily into the jaws of the alligator, because it groaned after having roared. I am comforted now, since my death even is a vengeance. You have fallen into the snare, and now I shall have a human companion among the fishes of the lake.’

“ ‘Traitor!’ I answered, stretching myself back; ‘is it thus you reward me for endeavouring to save your life?’

“ ‘Yes,’ he answered; ‘I know I might have saved myself by your aid, but I prefer that you should die with me. I like your death better than my life. Come!’

“ With this explanation his two hard bronzed hands fastened upon mine with a tremendous grasp; his eyes flared; his mouth foamed; his strength, whose loss a moment ago he had so piteously deplored, returned to him, augmented by the fury of revenge; he set his feet like two levers against the side of the rock, and bounded about like a tiger on the root which still supported him, and which he endeavoured to break, that his weight might the more surely drag me down with him into the abyss, laughing all the time with the frantic laugh of a demoniac. One of my knees was fortunately fast in the crevice of a rock; my arm was in a manner fixed to the tree round which I clung; and I struggled against the efforts of the dwarf with all the despairing energy of self-preservation. From time to time, as I could collect breath, I called loudly on Bug-Jargal; but the noise of the waterfall left me little expectation of being heard.

“ Meanwhile the dwarf, who had not anticipated so much resistance, redoubled his efforts, and wore me out with a series of furious tugs. I began to lose my strength; my arm was almost paralysed with cramp; my sight began to fail; livid lights danced before my eyes; my ears tingled with strange sounds; I heard the root cracking before it finally gave way, and the monster laughing and howling immediately below me. In a last effort of despair I called ‘ Bug-Jargal ! ’ once more, and was answered by the barking of a dog. I turned my eyes: Bug-Jargal and his faithful animal were at the entrance of the subterranean passage. He saw my danger at a glance. ‘ Hold for a moment more, ’ he cried. Habibrah, maddened by my prospect of salvation, and foaming with rage, called out, ‘ Come ! I say, come ! ’ and collected for a last pull his preternatural vigour. My wearied arm lost its hold of the tree; one moment more and I was gone, when I was seized from behind by Rask. His timely aid saved me. Habibrah, exhausted by his final effort, let go my hand, the root on which he leaned broke beneath his weight; and as Rask drew me violently back, the wretched dwarf, screaming out a parting curse, fell back into the horrible abyss.

“ This was the end of my uncle’s jester.”

A similar scene is depicted with even greater power in *Notre Dame de Paris*, the *chef-d’œuvre* of Victor Hugo. A beautiful gipsy-girl, Esmeralda, — loved reverentially by Quasimodo, a deformed, deaf, one-eyed dwarf, loved sensually by the priest of Notre Dame, whose attempts she had repulsed,—is being hung in the Place de la Grève, having been betrayed to death by the humiliated and vindictive priest. Quasimodo and the priest are kneeling on the highest balustrade of the tower of the cathedral watching the dying convulsions of the wretched girl,—the one with agonized sympathy, the other with diabolical joy.

“ At the moment when the struggles of the dying girl were the most horrible, a demoniacal laugh—a laugh such as a man cannot

utter till he has put off humanity—burst forth on the livid countenance of the priest. Quasimodo could not *hear* the laugh, but he saw it. He stepped back a pace or two behind him, and then rushing furiously upon him, hurled the wretched archdeacon over the edge of the balustrade.

“The priest exclaimed, ‘Damnation!’ and fell. The stone gutter, over which he had been kneeling, arrested him in his fall. He clung to it with a despairing grasp, and was about to utter a second cry, when he looked up and saw above him the vengeful face of Quasimodo. Then he became silent.

“The abyss was below him—a fall of two hundred feet, and then the pavement. In this horrible position, the archdeacon spoke not a word, uttered not a groan. He only twisted himself on the gutter in frantic efforts to climb up again; but his hands had no hold on the smooth granite, and his feet only scraped the wall without helping him. Those who have mounted the towers of Notre Dame may remember a stone projection immediately under the balustrade. It was on this projection that the miserable priest exhausted all his strength in endeavouring to gain a footing, but in vain.

“Quasimodo might have rescued him from his impending fate by simply stretching out his hand; but he did not even look at him. He saw nothing but the Place de la Grève, the gibbet, and the gipsy-girl. He leaned against the precise stone of the balustrade where the priest had kneeled a moment before; and there gazing mute and motionless on the only object the world contained for him, he stood like a man struck by lightning, while tears flowed silently and fast from his single eye.

“The archdeacon panted for breath. His bald forehead streamed with perspiration; his nails were torn by the stone; his knees were excoriated by the rough wall. He heard his surplice, which had caught upon the gutter, crack and tear at each fresh struggle. To complete the horror of his situation, the gutter ended in a leaden pipe, which already began to bend under his weight. The archdeacon felt it slowly sinking under him. The miserable man said to himself that, when his hands should be paralyzed with fatigue, when his surplice should be quite torn, when the lead should have altogether given way, he *must* fall, and indescribable terror seized upon his soul. From time to time he looked down upon a small platform about ten feet below him, formed by some broken stones and sculptured figures, and besought Heaven in his agony to let

him pass his whole life on this space of two feet square, rather than die this fearful death. Once he looked down on the pavement of the *Place*, far, far beneath ; and when he raised his head his hair was standing on end with horror.

“ The silence of these two men was something terrible. While the priest was struggling in this frightful fashion, a few feet above him Quasimodo gazed at the scaffold and wept.

“ The archdeacon at last, seeing that all his struggles only served to shake the frail support to which he clung, lay perfectly still. He was there, holding by the gutter, scarcely breathing, never moving, giving no other sign of life than the convulsive twitchings of the dreamer who dreams that he is falling. His eyes were wide open, fixed, and seemed starting out of his head. Little by little he lost ground, his fingers slipped along the gutter, the lead gradually bent further and further, and he became increasingly conscious of the weight of his body and the weakness of his arms. He looked one by one at the impassive figures sculptured on the tower, like him suspended over the abyss, but without pity for him or terror for themselves. Everything was stone around ; before his eyes grotesque and monstrous heads, far below him at the bottom the pavement of the square, just above him Quasimodo weeping.

“ In the *Place* below were some groups of curious observers, who were quietly watching the struggles of the priest, and trying to guess who was the madman who amused himself with such strange and perilous antics. The priest heard their comments as their faint clear voices reached him in the still air, saying, ‘ But he will break his neck.’

“ Quasimodo wept.

“ At last the wretched man, foaming with rage and terror, perceived that all was of no avail. He collected all his remaining strength for one despairing effort. He stiffened his limbs upon the gutter, pushed against the wall frantically with his knees, fastened his hand to a cleft in the stone, and succeeded in raising himself a few inches. But the commotion caused a sudden bend in the leaden pipe, his surplice was rent in twain, and feeling everything give way beneath him, he shut his eyes, let go his hold, and fell.

“ Quasimodo watched him falling. A fall from such a height is seldom perpendicular. The archdeacon launched into the air, fell at first with head downward and arms extended, then he turned

round twice or thrice and fell on the roof of a building, where he was partially crushed and broken. But he was not dead when he struck; Quasimodo saw him endeavour to cling to the tiles, but the incline was too steep, and he had no strength left. He slipped down the roof, and fell with a rebound upon the pavement, where he moved no more.

“Quasimodo then raised his eye to look once more upon the girl, whose limbs hanging from the gibbet he could see still quivering under her white dress in the last agonies of death; then he looked down on the archdeacon stretched at the foot of the tower, crushed out of the very semblance of humanity, and exclaimed with a sob which shook his whole frame, ‘Alas, all I ever loved!’”

But perhaps the greatest achievement in this line is to be found in *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, by the same author. This is a whole volume supposed to be written by a convict the day before his execution, describing in the minutest detail the sensations, anticipations, reflections, terrors, and agonies of each successive hour as it brings him nearer to his doom. For a *shocking* display of perverted genius and power we know nothing like it; but quotations are of course impossible. There is something revolting as well as preposterous in the conception of a man on the eve of a violent and certain death thus watching, anatomizing, and recording his own awful emotions.

Nearly every observer has been struck with the hold which the desire and the pursuit of wealth and material prosperity seem to have taken of the French nation. Formerly other passions predominated over the thirst for riches. Glory, honour, enterprise, intellectual distinction, were more than gold. The man

who sought to be wealthy, and who became so, used to be held in low esteem in comparison with him who sought to be great or famous, and attained his end. Now all this is changed. The taste for luxury has become a passion. The millionaire has become the national idol. The avaricious appetite seems to have taken possession of the whole people. Dreams of unexpected, sudden, fabulous wealth appear to be universally indulged in. Many causes have contributed to this. Revolutions, rapid and incalculable turns of the wheel of political fortune, have left scarcely any power stable and enduring except that of money. Millions gained in a few months by contractors, stock-jobbers, and railway speculators, have gone far to demoralize the nation. Every one sees that the men who have thus vaulted into affluence are not specially clever or specially industrious; and every one fancies there is no reason why he may not do as well as they. Then the prevalent irreligion of most classes, except the poor, has taught all to look for their paradise on earth, and to frame it out of the most earthly elements,—out of luxury, which wealth could furnish,—out of love, such as wealth could also buy. Those who could not revel in the wealth itself, could at least revel in the description of it. Those who failed of the reality could find some compensation, some delusive enjoyment, in the vivid picture and the transient dream. Thus arose the demand for romances of which the central figure is some hero possessed of countless and inexhaustible millions, and of which

every page gives evidence of an invention and imagination actually on the rack to produce conceptions of the most *recherché* and unheard-of luxury. The writers were as eager to supply as the public to demand this gorgeous, intoxicating, and unwholesome pabulum. For their passion for gold, and all that gold can purchase, had been goaded and inflamed almost into frenzy by their peculiar position. Usually poor, yet in virtue of their education in close contact daily with the rich ; living a life of toil and privation, yet in virtue of their brevet rank as men of talent, enjoying, on a footing of nominal equality, the hospitality of the luxurious millionaire ; surrounded with every species of appetizing pleasure which they see others plunged in and gloating over, but which they are too penniless to share ; spending their evenings in brilliant theatres or magnificent saloons, amid every kind of beauty and indulgence that can delight or irritate the senses, and retiring from all this at night to their squalid garret, their homeless hearth, and their empty soul,—who can wonder that their fancy should run riot in meretricious pictures of material splendours and material joys ? and when once embarked in this career, millions are as easy to create as thousands, and far more exciting. Here we have the *fons et origo* of that class of French novels of which *Monte-Christo* is the type and crown—a work which has driven thousands half wild with envy and impotent desire.

The plot of *Monte-Christo* is as follows :—A meritorious young sailor, captain of a merchant vessel



belonging to Marseilles, is denounced as a Buonapartist agent by two enemies, one of whom desires his post while the other covets his mistress. He is arrested on his marriage day and imprisoned in the Château d'If, an island off the south coast of France. Here he remains for fourteen years, in the course of which he manages, by means of a subterranean passage which he excavates, to establish a communication with an old and very learned Italian abbé, who teaches him much science and many languages, and ends with disclosing to him the secret of a vast treasure which he believes to be hidden in the island of Monte-Christo, a desert rock near the Tuscan shore. The abbé dies, and the young sailor conceals himself in his shroud, and contrives to be thrown into the sea instead of his deceased friend. He cuts open the shroud; escapes by swimming; goes to Monte-Christo; discovers and disinters the treasure (which consists of countless millions in gold and precious jewels); and after a few years reappears in the world as Count of Monte-Christo, and the possessor of fabulous wealth, to commence his work of rewarding his friends and punishing his enemies,—both of which purposes he carries out by means of the most complicated plots, mysterious appearances, and melodramatic *coups de théâtre*, in the worst taste, and of the most extravagant conception. Wherever he appears, he lives in the most astounding and elaborate luxury, and behaves with the most ostentatious generosity; but the generosity rather of a *parvenu* than a prince. His mansions are furnished with unimaginable

splendour; his yacht is a miracle of gorgeous and elegant contrivances; he presents wonderful diamonds to wretched innkeepers who have served him, and bestows unrivalled emeralds on the Sultan and the Pope to purchase the freedom of a beautiful Greek and the life of a Roman bandit. He is served by black and silent servants; wherever he goes unexpected allies and *protégés* start up beneath his feet to do his bidding; he is in secret communication with all the potentates of the earth; he makes appointments to the minute months beforehand and thousands of miles distant, keeps them at the last stroke of the clock, and apologizes for being two seconds late. In short, the whole story reads like the *Arabian Nights* adapted to Paris life in the reign of Louis Philippe. The taste of the whole is shocking; but it cannot be denied that the pictures are gorgeous, and thoroughly oriental both in their magnificence and their monstrosity: nor can we wonder that the work attained an extraordinary popularity among a people thirsting for material luxury and enjoyment—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."

The next morbid phase into which the insatiable passion for excitement plunged the novelists of France is that of which the works of Eugène Sue, especially *Atar-Gul* and *Les Mystères de Paris*, offer the most perfect type. It may be called "the *criminal-monstrosity* phase," or the phase of moral horrors and abominations. Its peculiar feature is a combination

of the morally detestable with the psychologically impossible. The imagination is strained, spurred, and as it were stimulated by intoxicating drinks, to conceive every variety and abyss of crime ; to paint the worst dens of infamy and sanguinary brutality which the cellars and catacombs of Paris can supply, to depict the daily life and the habitual sentiments, desires, and language of the hideous wretches who inhabit them ; and then to place in the midst of these obscene haunts and these abandoned desperadoes some maiden of angelic loveliness and purity, who walks unharmed among the squalid and ruffianly vice around her. Where the plot does not lend itself to this unnatural conception, the needed contrast is found in some other fashion. *Atar-Gul* is the story of a domestic negro in one of the West-Indian colonies of France, who is possessed through life by the most diabolic spirit of cruelty and revenge ; who, having his master's full confidence and regard, continues to be considered by every one as a perfect specimen and treasure of devotion and gratitude, yet pursues for years a deliberate plan for the destruction of his master's family and the infliction of every species of suffering he can devise ; and finally, when his master is paralytic and unable either to defend himself or denounce his enemy, tortures his last hours by explaining to him the various schemes by which he had made his life miserable, and gloats over the impotent horror and indignation of the man who had so long loved and trusted him, and whom at last he thus barbarously undeceives.

The *finale* and crowning stroke of the conception is the awarding to this finished and utterly unredeemed ruffian of the Monthyon prize for pre-eminent virtue, by men who had witnessed his apparent devotion, but were unacquainted with the true secret.

*Atar-Gul* was, we believe, the first production of Eugène Sue; *Les Mystères de Paris*, which followed it some years later, was every way worthy of so unhealthy a *debut*. This work enjoyed for a considerable period almost unexampled popularity and circulation. That it should have done so appears to us in the highest degree discreditable to the critical as well as to the moral taste of the French; for anything more confused and unartistic than the narrative, anything more unnatural and unreal than the characters (with one or two exceptions), it is impossible to conceive. Nearly all the *dramatis personæ* are criminals of the lowest order and the most desperate and depraved natures. Nearly all the more striking and laboured scenes are laid in those secluded or subterranean haunts of squalid misery and loathsome sin with which a great city like Paris is sure to swarm. Every atrocious crime, from gigantic swindling to hired murder, which lawless fancy could invent or lawless men could perpetrate, is here delineated in the most revolting detail. The actors are brought upon the stage only to commit these crimes. The men, the women, even the children, are rather born devils than fallen and abandoned human beings. The author seems to have resolved that no one should be able to

surpass him, or to find it worth while to follow him, in this line. He has exhausted the field. We verily believe he has left nothing to be gathered by any gleaner. In the midst of all these lurid horrors two characters are introduced by way of relief and contrast. One is a young sovereign prince, Grand Duke of Gerolstein, gifted with vast wealth, irresistible fascination, and fabulous physical strength, who goes about in various disguises, as he expresses it, "playing at Providence," relieving misery, righting wrongs, and punishing crime. In his judgments and inflictions, it might strike an ordinary reader that he is scarcely less scrupulous, natural, or decent than the criminals whom he detects and crushes. He puts out the eyes of one hardened murderer, by way of rendering his punishment appropriate and lingering. He lets loose one woman of preternatural fascinations and preternatural profligacy (everything in the book is preternatural, superlative, and fabulous) on a notary whose crimes he desires to drag to light, with orders (which are executed to the letter and described as minutely as in a *procès verbal*) to drive him into frenzy by perpetually provoking his sensual desires and never gratifying them. Yet this Prince is the virtuous man of the book. The female miracle of it is Fleur de Marie, a young maiden, the lost daughter of wealthy and noble parents,—of the above-mentioned Grand Duke and his mistress, in fact, but whom Rodolph believed to be dead,—who is brought up amid murderers, prostitutes, and thieves, of the very lowest and filthiest description ;

but who has retained through all surroundings her innate purity of soul, exquisite delicacy of sentiment, and rich warmth of heart. She is beautifully painted, but, as we have said, she is a psychological impossibility. Such was the romance which for a while dominated Paris, and contributed not a little to the election of the author to the National Assembly ten years ago, by an overwhelming and nearly unexampled majority of votes as the representative of the Socialist party.

The unenviable success of opening an entirely new vein in this mine of intellectual pathology has been achieved by Alexander Dumas the younger—the son of the most prolific and extravagant romance writer of this, or perhaps of any, day. *Monte Christo* is the typical production of the father; *La Dame aux Camelias*, the typical production of the son. The *specialité* of M. Dumas, *fils* (as he is usually termed),—the particular field which he has selected,—is the delineation of the *demi-monde*, or courtesan life. In France this world crosses the other more legitimate world so frequently, the two societies run so parallel and so often touch and even intermingle, that pictures of the one have almost always involved allusions to, and occasional excursions within the limits of, the other. Episodes and complications connected with the *demi monde* are therefore to be met with in many recent Parisian novels; But M. Dumas, *fils*, is the first writer who has deliberately, consistently, and as it were almost professionally, laid his scenes in this anomalous world, and chosen his characters from

among the people who inhabit it and frequent it. *La Dame aux Camélias*, and *Le Demi Monde* (which is a drama, and had an enormous success when brought out on the stage), are devoted to the description of courtesan life; and *Le Roman d'une Femme* is a narrative in which the two societies—the recognized and the unrecognized—are placed side by side, with all their clashing engagements and incongruous affections and inextricable links—with their painful contrasts and still more painful resemblances. It is impossible to deny that M. Dumas, *filis*, is a master of his craft. Not only is he thoroughly at home in the society which he depicts, not only does he know to its very core and in all its recesses the social and (so to speak) the inner life of its denizens, both male and female; but he handles his materials as an artist, a philosopher, and almost as a moralist—if that epithet can fairly be applied to a man too familiar with all forms of profligacy to shrink from any, to whom voluptuous indulgence is one of the ordinary phenomena of life, and who does not even profess to have any sentiments of right or wrong concerning it. He is a conscientious and consummate workman; he makes a really profound study of his subject; he prepares his canvas with scientific care; his drawing is always distinct; his colouring, always vivid, is never outrageous; his figures, such as they are, are in harmony with themselves and in keeping with each other; he never condescends to the monstrous, and scarcely ever to the loathsome. Compared with his father, he is a

model of high art ; compared with Eugène Sue, he is almost a classic ; compared with Ernest Feydeau, he may be regarded as decent and almost pure. It is true he has expressly selected scenes and characters which it is usual to ignore, or to notice at a distance, or to look at and pass to the other side ; it is true that he describes them with a plainness of language and fulness of detail hitherto unexampled in works intended to take rank as literature, to be read avowedly, and to lie on the tables of decent drawing-rooms ; it is true there is something startling and almost stunning in the unapologetic and as it were physiological coolness of his analysis. But he writes rather like a man to whom reticence is unknown than to whom license is attractive. He has, indeed, no scruples of modesty to restrain him from saying anything which it lies in his way to say ; but, on the other hand, he has not, like so many of his countrymen, a disordered prurience perpetually goading him to go out of his way to find precisely the thing which he ought not to say. In fact, though about the most *lawless* of French novelists, yet, compared with most of them, he may almost be deemed estimable ; and if it be permissible at all—which it is hard to grant—to paint in detail a life of which frailty, sin, and often abandoned viciousness, constitute the atmosphere and action, then there is little to quarrel with either in the science or the talent of the painter.\*

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\* From this appreciative admission—which in its context is almost praise—we must make, however, one weighty exception.



If we could venture to separate the *tendency* of a work from its features and its character, or to set off the lessons it is fitted to convey to thoughtful minds against the tone of its sentiments and the probable influence of its pictures upon ordinary readers, we should be more than half disposed to class M. Dumas' novels among *moral* fictions. There pervades them all a conviction, as profound as that of Solomon, and based upon a similar experience, of the utter worthlessness of sensual enjoyments, of the hollowness of a life of pleasure, of the disappointment and satiety of those who lead it, of the mockery of all vicious hopes, of the delusive nature of all casual and wandering affections. The most boundless appliances of luxury, the most complete and intoxicating of illicit successes, are "apples on the Dead-Sea shore." The better the instincts and the nobler the capacities of the votary of pleasure, the more certain and the more bitter will be his disenchantment. The endeavour to import into the life of the *demi-monde* any real sentiment or any genuine affection, is persistently and convincingly represented as inevitably hopeless and fatal. The actors in his sad dramas of passion and of sin are always punished and always wretched. They pay for hours of frenzied and forbidden joys by years of fear-

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*Antonine*, the last work of M. Dumas, in the cold cynicism of its conclusion, and still more in its shameless unveiling of some of the most perverse and revolting vagaries of unhallowed passion, seems to us the saddest illustration and measure of French demoralization yet given to the world.

ful expiation. The utterly heartless and selfish are always shown to be the only ones tolerably happy; and these are never made the attractive or the fascinating personages of the story. This is cynical morality, no doubt, but it is morality which will produce its effect notwithstanding; and all the more so upon the class to whom it is addressed, as springing out of reaction and experience, and not out of principle, and as coming from a man in whom the moral sense, as we understand it, seems to have no existence. In the *Dame aux Camélias*, the heroine, a courtesan awakened to purity and aspiration by a real passion, ends a life consisting of scenes of the most poignant and ever-recurring anguish, varied only with days of transient and precarious rapture, by a death of lingering and tortured desolation; while her lover is, and deserves to be, almost more wretched than herself. In the *Roman d'une Femme*, an exquisite and chaste young wife, whose thread of life, owing to a casual frailty of her husband, becomes entangled with that of a clever and merciless *lorette*, dies broken-hearted, at the age of twenty-two, having destroyed husband, father, child, and friend, by the fault of one nearly unconscious hour. With M. Dumas, retribution is abundantly and *logically* dealt out to all the frail and guilty. Vice is never made happy, except it is so abandoned and so gross as to lose all its fascinations, and to become repellant and not dangerous.

From these tales—and from another which in some

features may be classed among them, and which has recently earned an infamous celebrity\*—we gather two or three features of Parisian social life which throw much light on the subject we are discussing. One is particularly noticeable. Their heroes have nothing else to do in life but to make love. They have no business, no profession, no occupation. Many of them are men of fortune, who can afford to be idle, and to waste wealth in the pursuit of pleasure. But this is by no means universally or necessarily the case. Those who have only a scanty income—*seulement de quoi vivre*, as they express it—seem to lead pretty much the same sort of life, as long as their means last, and sometimes long after they are ruined. When this point is reached, they game, contract debts, marry an heiress, or blow out their brains. In England the great majority of young men of education have something regular to do—an employment at least, if not a profession. If they are born to a fortune, they have usually political duties or occupation connected with the management of their estates, or they travel or enter the army. If they are poor, they embrace com-

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\* *Fanny*, by Ernest Feydeau. It is scarcely fair, however, to rank this disreputable volume, the success of which is in itself a scandal, with the artistic performances of M. Dumas,  *fils*. It is a mere picture—drawn with a certain power and richness of colouring no doubt—of irrational and ungoverned passion; and is stained by indelicacies more monstrous in imagination and more daring in expression than are to be found in any other specimen of this sort of literature that has fallen under our notice. Its excesses of licence, rather than any notable ability, we believe, caused its sudden popularity.

merce or the civil service, or some one or other of the laborious callings that lead to wealth. If they have only a moderate income, they almost always eke it out by entering on some profession that is respectable, if not very lucrative. It is exceptional, and is not considered creditable, for a young man to be without some recognised and regular occupation or vocation. In France, on the contrary,—in French novels at least,—what is here the exception appears to be the rule. The result is two-fold, judging by the descriptions of society which we are now considering. In the first place, these men being utterly *désœuvrés*, without any other call upon their time, give themselves up wholly to the contrivances and the enjoyments of intrigue. When in love, they throw themselves unreservedly into the pastime; their whole thoughts and their entire hours are absorbed in it; they do nothing else morning, noon, and night; it is not to them an episode, a reward, or a refreshment,—it is their daily bread, their business, their calling, their labour, their life. The lover does not go to his mistress in his leisure moments, in his hours of relaxation, in his holidays, in his evenings, “after office-hours!” he lies at her feet all day and every day; he adulates, contemplates, and caresses her from Monday morning till Saturday night.\* He is described as plunged in a

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\* J'allais chez elle à l'heure de déjeuner; n'ayant rien à faire de la journée, je ne sortais qu'avec elle. Elle me retenait à diner, la soirée s'ensuivait par conséquent; bientôt, lorsque l'heure de rentrer arrivait, nous imaginâmes mille prétextes, nous primes mille pré-

sort of sea of delirious and delusive intoxication, coming to the surface only every now and then to breathe. The result, of course, inevitably is both that—thinking of nothing else—passion is pampered into an excess and perverted into fancies which together become almost insanity; and that—doing nothing else—sentiment dies out from sheer weariness and reaction, and becomes quenched in sickening satiety. The *liaison*, even when comparatively pure and noble, having no relief or variety while it lasts, cannot, in the nature of things, last long. In the second place,—and this is a consequence shared in a qualified degree by all great cities where the rich and idle congregate,—the number of these idle men who have to kill time in seeking pleasure goes far to explain the laxity of morals and frailty of reputations believed to prevail among the *Femmes du monde* in France. It is a social country; people live much in public, and much in company. A far larger portion of the time both of men and women is passed in making and receiving visits than with us. The number of people available for this occupation is unusually great. So many men have

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cautions illusoires qui, au fond, n'en étaient point. Enfin je vivais, pour ainsi dire, chez elle.' *Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle*, par Alfred de Musset:

See also *Dame aux Camélias* and *Antonine*, passim.

“ Mon existence était sédentaire. Je passais la journée chez ma maîtresse: mon plus grand plaisir était de l'emmener à la campagne durant les beaux jours d'été, et de me coucher près d'elle dans les bois, sur l'herbe, ou sur la mousse. . . . En hiver, comme elle aimait le monde, nous courions les bals et les masques, en sorte que cette vie oisive ne cessait jamais.” *Ibid.*

nothing to do but to pay court to women, and no scruples to prevent them from paying it in any mode and under any circumstances, that, in certain classes of society, women may be said to pass a considerable portion of their lives in a state of siege; they are perpetually surrounded by courtiers and "pretenders;" and as, alas! they are nearly as unoccupied as their adulators, and often quite as *ennuyés*, what wonder that so many fall under the combined influence of temptation, tedium, and bad example!

Again: nothing makes a stronger or more painful impression on the reader than the unfeeling brutality with which the lovers in these tales habitually treat their mistresses, even when these mistresses are ladies of high position, superior education, and unblemished reputation. If any one is disposed to think lightly and leniently of those habits of license and intrigue which seem so general in France, and which are far from unknown here, he will do well to ponder this peculiar phase of character, as depicted in the literature in question by those who know it well and share it so thoroughly that they have almost ceased to excuse it or to be conscious of it. In the novels of George Sand, of Dumas, *filis*, of Ernest Feydeau, and of Alfred de Musset, the heroines are ladies endowed with every amiable and attractive quality, except that rigid principle which is scarcely to be looked for in such society; fascinating, affectionate, full of heart and soul; capable not only of earnest and passionate but of devoted and self-sacrificing attachment, and lavishing all the price-

less treasures of a rich and noble nature on their unworthy suitors ; risking, if not actually losing for them, peace, fame, a calm conscience, and a happy home ; giving themselves up with a completeness and confidingness of surrender which would be lovely and almost sublime, if only the cause were lawful and the object worthy ; trusting, soothing, aiding, enduring, worshipping, with a truth and fervour in which woman so rarely fails, and which man so rarely merits. But the men of the story—the objects and inheritors of all this affection—are represented—almost invariably, and as if it were the rule of life from which truth and notoriety permit the artist no departure—as becoming at once, not indeed insensible to, but utterly ungrateful for, the wealth of love lavished upon them ; repaying devotion with insult, and abandonment with *exigence* ; answering every fresh proof of fidelity and self-surrender with groundless jealousies and mean suspicions ; meeting every concession with some new outrage or some new demand ; treating the most faithful, tender, and noble-minded mistresses, the moment they have them in their power, as no *gentleman* could treat even the poorest *fille perdue* who still retained a woman's decency and a woman's form ;—in a word, displaying in every word and action a heartless egotism, a harsh and cruel tyranny, and a total want of respect and consideration for the most natural as for the most sacred feelings, which would seem incredible on any less authority than their own. For it is remarkable that the novels which most detail all these cruel and

selfish inflictions—which specify the worst brutalities inflicted by these lovers upon fond and tender women—are all *in the autobiographical form*:—it is the barbarian who describes his own barbarities—the executioner who records all the slow elaborate tortures he has practised on his victim,—sometimes, indeed, with a sort of conventional self-condemnation, though scarcely ever with self-loathing or self-surprise,—never with any indication of that burning shame which would make the record of such things impossible, even were the commission of them not so.

It will be obvious that the worst exemplifications of this hideous feature cannot stain our pages. It is not easy even to adduce any. They are so numberless and so perpetually recurring, that to quote them would be often to give the whole narration. *La Dame aux Camelias* is full of them,—consists of them,—some of a character and enormity which are scarcely conceivable,—yet all narrated by the offender himself. The same may be said of *Fanny*. The same may be said of *Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle*. The same may be said of *Elle et Lui*. In fact, they are all stories of a lover torturing his devoted and sensitive mistress to death by a series of ingenious insults, outrageous suspicions, cruel and exacting caprices, refined brutality, and a sort of cold superlative selfishness for which a fitting epithet really is not to be found. After describing a number of these brutalities, some of them almost incredible, the *Enfant du Siècle* sums up thus:—“Lecteur, cela dura six mois : pendant



six mois entiers, Brigitte, calomniée, exposée aux insultes du monde, eut à essayer de ma part tous les dédains et toutes les injures qu'un libertin colère et cruel peut prodiguer à la fille qu'il paye." \*

Another characteristic and, as far as we know, unique feature of these novels is the repeated pictures they present to us, not only of absolutely uncontrolled passions and emotions, indulged without reticence or shame, but of the entire absence apparently of any consciousness that such abandonment of all self-restraint is in any way disgraceful and unmanly. The heroes go into the most outrageous furies ; they roll on the ground in agonies of tears ; they pass from the wildest

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\* *Fanny* is from first to last the history, by himself, of a lover who maltreats and torments his mistress in every mode except actual personal violence,—by sarcasms, by insults, by suspicions, by cruel outrages upon every sentiment of duty, honour, and natural affection which she is endeavouring to retain. Yet most of the outrages are of such a character that we have searched in vain for any passage that it would be possible to extract. We can only convey the most faint and general conception of the narrative by saying, that the lover begins by being furious because his mistress stays by the bedside of her sick child, instead of visiting him as usual ; that he then falls so low as to regale her ears with every false and scandalous rumour that he can collect regarding her husband, whom, though she has betrayed him, she still esteems and values ; that he abuses her because she defends this husband against his calumnies ; and finally that, to punish the unhappy lady for refusing to fly with him, and abandon reputation, husband, and children at once, he, out of mere horrible perversity and *spite*, plunges into every sort of low debauchery ; and returns to her, day after day, soiled and reeking from the haunts of infamy in which he has been endeavouring, as it were, to revenge himself upon her ! And all this he relates himself !

excesses of love into the wildest excesses of hatred ; they become speechless with rage ; they gesticulate like madmen ; they give vent to all the unseemly violences of the half-childish, half-savage human animal, without dignity, decency, or drapery. It is not so much that they lose all self-control, as that they give no intimation that self-control is considered needful, or the want of it shameful. Extremes to which no provocation could goad an Englishman seem to be simple every-day occurrences among these spoiled children of licence and intrigue. "The first thing I did" (says one), "as soon as I was able to rise after my wound, was to run to my mistress's house. I found her alone, sitting in the corner of her room, her countenance fallen and disturbed. I loaded her with the most violent reproaches ; I was drunk with despair. *I cried out till the whole house echoed with the clamour ; and at the same time my tears so interrupted my words that I FELL ON THE BED to let them flow freely.*" He ends by striking his mistress on the back of the neck ; and when, in spite of all this treatment, she comes to him the same evening to beg forgiveness and reconciliation, he takes a carving-knife and threatens to kill her. The same man, a year or two later, finds another lady to love him, to whom he behaves much in the same way,—“treating her” (he says) “now as an abandoned woman, and the next instant as a divinity. A quarter of an hour after insulting her, I was kneeling at her feet ; as soon as I ceased to accuse, I began to apologise ; when I could

no longer rail at her, I wept over her. A monstrous delirium, a rapturous fever, seized upon me; I nearly lost my senses in the violence of my transports; I did not know what to say, or to do, or to imagine, to repair the evil I had wrought. I spoke of blowing out my brains if I ever ill-treated her again. *These alternations of passion often lasted whole nights.*"\* The following is the reception given to a lady who comes to visit her lover (whom she has wronged, certainly) as he recovers from a severe illness:—

“Elle se pencha sur mon lit, et des deux mains souleva son voile. . . . ‘Fanny!’ m’écriai-je tout-à-coup, en levant les deux bras. Elle s’affaissa en sanglotant sur ma poitrine. Mais la mémoire m’était revenue avec la connaissance, et *la frappant au front de mes poings fermés*, je la détachai de moi en m’écriant comme un furieux: ‘Va-t’en d’ici!’ Elle crut que j’étais fou encore, et se détourna en pleurant; mais retrouvant un reste de force dans ma colère, *je la frappais encore à l’épaule*, et m’élançant de mon lit, je m’abattais sur elle, et roulai à terre à ses pieds.”†

One quotation more and we have done. This novel ends with another scene, similar, but yet more atrocious. After heaping every sort of verbal outrage and abuse on the unhappy woman who had given herself to him,

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\* *Confessions d'un Enfant du Siècle*. These are not, as might be imagined, specimens taken from the poor production of some hack caterer for the lowest class of readers. They are extracts from a work of unusual power, of profound melancholy, and sadly and almost soundly moral in the lesson it inculcates. It contains the truest, most painful, and most warning pictures we have ever met with of the certainty and the terrible degree in which a career of profligacy, however brief and uncongenial, poisons all legitimate enjoyment and all purer and serener love.

† *Fanny*, par Ernest Feydeau.

for six or seven pages of fluent insult, the narrator of his own shame proceeds :

“ Elle se leva enfin désespérée, et voulut partir. Mais je la retins, la poussai au fond de la chambre, et m’adossant contre la porte, les bras croisés : ‘ Tu entendras tout ! ’ m’écriai-je. Et alors je me mis à haleter ; et ne trouvant plus rien à lui dire, je la menaçai des poings, en trépignant et en criant ; et elle me regardait de côté avec un indicible terreur. Enfin les paroles, une fois de plus, jaillirent de ma bouche : ‘ Jamais je n’ai cru en toi. Je sentais si bien que tu me trompais, qu’à mon tour—malheureux que je suis ! —j’ai voulu souiller notre amour. Apprends-le donc, si tu ne t’en es pas doutée ; moi qui t’adorais, je t’ai trompée avec les plus viles des femmes.’ ”

Conceive an English gentleman in such a passion with the faithless lady whom he loved that his fury cannot find utterance, setting his back against the door, panting with rage, stamping and shaking his fists at her like a dumb idiot ; and at last, when words come to his relief, using his recovered speech to overwhelm her with *noirceurs* which could never enter the thoughts or pass the lips of any but the shameless and the abandoned ! And conceive further, his describing all this himself, without the slightest indication of reticence or humiliation !

It might seem impossible to go beyond or below this ; yet if there be a lower depth still, that depth has been reached in two of the last novels that have issued from the press, written by two of the most noted writers of the day. *Elle et Lui* and *Lui et Elle* bear the names respectively of George Sand and Paul de Musset. They are said to be, and we believe they

are, the personal scandalous adventures of the writers, wrought into fiction with some colouring, but with little deviation from historic fact. *Elle et Lui* describes the connection of Madame Dudevant (under her *nom de plume* of George Sand) with Alfred de Musset, from the lady's point of view, and paints scenes and characters as she would wish them to be believed by the world. Even on her own showing, the story is shocking and revolting enough; but she paints herself as the loving, clinging, much-enduring, if yielding and guilty, woman; and her lover as cruel, exacting, capricious, and incurably licentious. This lover, so delineated,—whom every one recognized as Alfred de Musset, a poet and novelist of great merit,—is dead; and Paul de Musset, not choosing that such a false picture of his brother should go forth uncontradicted, and having materials and documents at his command, thought fit to give, also in the form of fiction, Alfred's version of the *liaison*. Here, as might be expected, the colours are reversed: the gentleman is described as all that is amiable, attractive, faithful, and devoted; while the lady acts throughout as a thoroughly heartless and abandoned creature, though full of fascination, and not incapable for a time of experiencing an absorbing passion. Which of the parties speaks the truth and which lies, or in what proportion the indisputable falsehood is to be divided between them, it is needless to inquire. But assuredly nothing can be more disgraceful than the things revealed—except the revelation of them.

From the popularity, the general agreement, the consentaneous tone, both as to character and plot, of the works we have been considering, as well as from the absence of all exposing and protesting criticism, and from much corroborative information that has reached us, it would seem difficult to resist the following conclusions. That illicit *liaisons*, especially with married women, are, in the upper and the idler classes of Paris and the great cities of France, the rule rather than the exception,—among the *bourgeoisie* and rural society, we believe, the case is different,—they are too busy for a life of dissipation and intrigue. That, in the vast majority of instances, these *liaisons* have their origin—not, as among the Italians, in genuine and absorbing passion, nor, as among the Germans, in blended sentimentality and sense, but—in vanity, want of occupation, and love of excitement on the part of the men, and in love of admiration, and (what is worse) mere love of luxury, on the part of the women,—whose suitors furnish those means of extravagance which their husbands refuse;—and that this distinction is to be traced to the peculiar character and temperament of the nation. That into these *liaisons* the men appear habitually to import a coarseness and a cruelty, as well as an unchivalric and ungenerous roughness, indicating, not so much that they do not appreciate the sacrifice which the woman makes in giving herself to them, as that they do not believe it is any sacrifice at all. In fine, so little respect does there seem to be left for the feelings of

women, so little belief in their virtue, so little trust in their sincerity or disinterestedness,—so completely have calculation, luxury, mutual contempt, and mutual mistrust, poisoned the tenderest relation of life and its strongest passion,—that the fitting epithet to apply to this phase of French society is not so much “immorality” as corruption.

We are little disposed to indulge in trite moralities, or rigid censoriousness, or stern condemnations in which is no tenderness for frailty and no mercy for repentance. But surely those who incline to think lightly of sacred ties and leniently of voluptuous indulgence and unlicensed attachments, may find a warning in these pictures of a social life where this lenience and levity prevail. They may see there how surely and how rapidly want of feeling follows want of principle; how disbelief in virtue grows out of experience in frailty; how scanty is the joy to be derived from the emotions of love when those emotions are reduced to their mere beggarly material elements, divorced from the redeeming spirit and stripped of the concealing and adorning drapery of fancy and of grace; and at what a fearful cost to heart and soul these feverish and wandering gratifications are purchased—how poor the article and how terrible the price,—a disenchanting world, a paralyzed and threadbare soul, a past with no sweet and gentle memories, a future with no yearnings and no hopes.

It cannot be denied that the prevalence and wide circulation of such a popular literature as that of which

we have endeavoured to portray the more characteristic features, is a fact both fearful and momentous, whether we regard it as an indication or as an influence—as a faithful reflection of the moral condition of the people among whom it flourishes, or as the most powerful determining cause of that condition. The more inherent and universally diffused excellences and defects of national character may, we believe, be discerned more truly in the favourite dramas and novels than in any other productions of the national mind. They show the sort of recreation which is instinctively resorted to when the tension of pursuit and effort is relaxed—the natural tendency of the unbent bow. They also show the food which is habitually presented to the people by those who are familiar with their appetites and tastes, in their most impressible and passively recipient moods. And what justifies us in drawing the most condemnatory and melancholy conclusions from the multiplication and success of the works we have been considering is, that they are *characteristic, and not exceptional*. They are not the repast provided by an inferior class of writers for the interest and amusement of an inferior class of readers. They form the light reading, the *belles-lettres*, of a vast proportion, if not the generality, of educated men and women. They indicate the order of thoughts and fancies to which these habitually and by preference turn, the plots which interest them most, the characters which seem to them most piquant or most familiar, the reflections which stir their feel-



ings the most deeply, the principles or sentiments by which their actions are most usually guided, the virtues they most admire, the vices they most tolerate;—they reflect, in a word, the daily life and features of themselves, and of the circles in which they live and move.

These productions, too, for the most part are written with great power and beauty, often with as much elevation of sentiment as is compatible with the absence of all strict principle and all definite morality. There is plenty of religion, and much even that is simple, touching, and true; but it is religion as affection and emotion—never as guide, governance, or creed. There is some reverence and much gratitude towards God; but little idea of obedience, sacrifice, or devotion. There is adulation and expectation, rather than worship or service. Then, again, there is vast sympathy with the suffering and the poor,—deep and genuine, if often irrational and extravagant; but it commonly degenerates into senseless animosity towards the rich, lawless hatred of settled institutions, and frantic rebellion against the righteous chain of cause and effect which governs social well-being. There are delineations of rapturous, irreproachable, almost angelic love; but some unhallowed memory, or some disordered association, almost always steps in to stain the idol and to desecrate the shrine. There are eloquence, pathos, and fancy in rich profusion; characters of high endowment and noble aspiration; scenes of exquisite

tenderness and chaste affection; pictures of saintly purity and martyr-like devotion; but something theatrical, morbid, and meretricious mingles with and mars the whole. There is every flower of Paradise,

“ But the trail of the serpent is over them all.”

The grandest gifts placed at the service of the lowest passions;—the holiest sentiments and the fondest moments painted in the richest colours of the fancy, only to be withered by cynical doubt or soiled by cynical indecency; the most secret and sacred recesses of the soul explored and mastered, not for reverential contemplation of their beauties and their mysteries, but in order to expose them to the desecrating sneers of a misbelieving and mocking world:—such is the work which genius must stoop to do, when faith in what is good, reverence for what is pure, and relish for what is natural, have died out from a nation's heart!

## CHATEAUBRIAND.

GREAT men, of the very first order of greatness,—“the heights and pinnacles of human mind,”—are of no country. They are cosmopolitan, not national. They belong not to the Teutonic, or the Anglo-Saxon, or the Italian, or the Gallic race, but to the Human race. They are stamped with the features, rich with the endowments, mighty with the power, instinct with the life, not of this or that phase or section of humanity, but of humanity itself, in its most unlimited development and its loftiest possibilities. There is no apparent reason why they might not have been born in any one of the nations into which the civilised modern world is divided as well as in another. The *universal* elements of their character and their intelligence override and obliterate the special ones. We do not think of Shakespeare and Bacon, of Spinoza and Descartes, of Newton and Galileo, of Columbus or Michael Angelo, of Kant or Goethe, as Frenchmen or Englishmen, Germans or Italians, but as MEN, whose capacities and whose achievements are at once the patrimony and the illustration of all peoples and all lands alike.

But there are great men of a secondary stature and a more bounded range,—men darkly wise and imperfectly and irregularly great, yet whose greatness

cannot be disputed, since, in spite of many moral shortcomings and much intellectual frailty, they have filled a large space in the world's eye, have done good service and earned high fame, have notably influenced the actions and the thoughts of their contemporaries, and produced works "which after-times will not willingly let die,"—and yet who are so prominently marked with the impress of their age and country, that no one can for a moment fail to recognise their origin. Every page of their writings, every incident of their career, every power they evince, every weakness they betray, proclaims aloud the Briton or the Frank. And we speak here not only of men of talent, but of men of unquestionable genius too. "Talent," as Sir James Mackintosh well defined it, is "habitual power of execution;" it is of many descriptions; it may be generated to some extent; it may be cultivated to almost any extent; and will naturally have a local stamp and colouring. "Genius" implies a *special* gift, an innate and peculiar endowment; Providence, with a mysterious and uncontrollable sovereignty, drops the seed into any soil; it might be expected, therefore, to be purely personal, rather than redolent of time and place. Yet, except in the case of those paramount and abnormal Intelligences of whom we have spoken above, men of genius, for the most part, are essentially national and secular,—visibly stamped with the image and superscription of the era in which they lived, and the land which gave them birth.

Of this secondary order of great men—unquestionably a man of genius, unquestionably also and *par excellence* a Frenchman, and a Frenchman of the nineteenth century—CHATEAUBRIAND was one of the most eminent and the most special. His career, his character, and his writings, are well worth the pains of studying. His career extended over the whole of the most momentous and exciting epoch of modern history, and was involved in some of its most stirring scenes. He was born in 1768, and died in 1848. He was old enough to feel an interest in the establishment of American Independence; and he lived to see the United States swell in number from thirteen to thirty-three, and their statesmen dwindle in capacity from Washington to Polk. He was presented in his eighteenth year to Louis XVI. in the days of his grandeur at Versailles, and he *might* have been presented in his eightieth year to Louis Napoleon, at the Elysée, as he marched back from exile on his way to the imperial throne. He was a fugitive to England in his youth, and ambassador to England in his old age. He served Napoleon, and he served Charles X. He lived through the three great moral, political, and social convulsions of modern times—the revolution of 1789, the revolution of 1830, the revolution of 1848. He was born under feudalism; he died under socialism. He opened his eyes on France when she was an ancient and hereditary monarchy: he beheld her “everything in turn and nothing long;” he lived to see the Second Republic, and almost to see the Second

Empire. His writings, varied in their range,—romantic, religious, polemic, and biographical,—are all peculiar and characteristic, and full of energy and warmth. By the common consent of his countrymen, he is regarded as having carried the poetry of prose composition to a pitch never approached by any one before or since, except Rousseau; and in that style of refined acrimony, quiet thrusts with polished rapier, and graceful throwing of poisoned epigrammatic javelins, which is so peculiarly French and which Frenchmen so inordinately value, he had confessedly no rival. He was, moreover, a real power in literature; his controversial writings undeniably exercised great influence over political transactions, and his sentimental writings exercised a still wider and more indisputable influence over the taste and tone of the lighter productions of his age. His character, finally, both in its strength, and its weakness, was peculiarly French. His unsociability apart, he might almost be taken as the typical man of his class, time, and country,—greatly exaggerated, however, especially in his defects. A sense of honour, quick, sensitive, and fiery, rather than national or deep; an hereditary high breeding, which displayed itself rather in exquisite grace and urbanity of manner than in real chastening of spirit; a native chivalry of temper and demeanour, but too superficial to render him truly either generous or amiable; vanity ignobly excessive and absolutely childish; and egotism carried to a point at which it became quite a crime, and almost a disease;—such

were the prominent features of Chateaubriand, according to every portrait we possess.

Of Chateaubriand's early years we know little that is reliable ; for we know nothing beyond what he has told us himself. His reminiscences of this period, it is true, occupy quite a sufficient portion of his autobiography ; but the *Memoires d'outre Tombe*, in which he records them, though begun when in the prime of life, were so often retouched and altered in later years, when his memory was failing and his imagination was every day growing more lawless and untruthful, and they are, moreover, so uniformly and obviously the production of a writer who sought to discover what was becoming rather than to remember what was correct, that we can trust their statements only when in themselves probable and characteristic. We do not mean to charge him with intentional falsehood in relating the events either of his earlier or later life ; but his fancy was so vivid and his vanity so irritable and insatiable, he had so rooted a conviction that everything connected with the Vicomte de Chateaubriand must be singular and wonderful, he was so constantly *en representation* both before himself and before the world, he was so full of the most transparent affectations as to his own sentiments,—in a word, he was so habitually insincere with himself (whether consciously or unconsciously we cannot pronounce), that we never know, unless we can check his narrative from independent sources, how far we are dealing with fact or fiction. We come across instances of this

inaccuracy and unfaithfulness in almost every page of his Memoirs ; so that we can proceed only with doubt and caution, making ample allowance as we go along for the motives which we know to have been at work.

François-René de Chateaubriand was born September 4th 1768, at Saint Malo in Brittany,—most reluctantly, as he informs us,—against his strong desire and in cruel disregard of his most vehement protests. The distaste for life, which he loses no opportunity of expressing—and which we may well conceive was in a measure genuine, for selfish men and proud men are seldom happy—manifested itself in him, we are required to believe, before his birth. He was not the eldest son : his father wanted a second boy, in order to secure the transmission of the family name : but Chateaubriand was so unwilling to come into the world that he sent four sisters before him, one after another, in the vain hope of quenching his parent's insatiable desire of offspring. “Je fus le dernier de ces dix enfants. Il est probable que mes quatre sœurs durent leur existence au désir de mon père d'avoir son nom assuré par l'arrivé d'un second garçon :—*je résistais ; j'avais une aversion pour la vie.*”<sup>\*</sup> He was a delicate infant: his life was in some danger, but was spared at the instance of a vow made by his nurse to the patron-saint of her village. His way of recording this childish peril is so characteristic in the turn of sentiment and expression, that it is

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\* In another passage he speaks of “la chambre ou ma mère m'infligea la vie” (vol. i. p. 23.)



worth quoting: "Je n'avais vécu que quelques heures, et *la pesanteur du temps était déjà marquée sur mon front*. Que ne me laissait-on mourir? Il entra dans les conseils de Dieu d'accorder au vœu de l'obscurité et de l'innocence la conservation des jours *qu'une vaine renommée menaçait d'atteindre*."

The father of Chateaubriand was a Breton gentleman of ancient family but decayed fortunes. He had acquired a moderate competence himself by a step which in those days indicated much good sense and force of character: he had entered the mercantile marine, made one or two successful voyages, and then settled for some years in the West-Indian colonies. As soon as he was in a position of reasonable independence, he returned to his native land, and purchased at Combourg, near Saint-Malo, an old ancestral estate and château; but the soil was poor, the château dreary, and the site desolate and forlorn. The son has left a most uninviting picture of both the paternal residence and the paternal character—the one cold and gloomy, the other severe, silent, passionate, and morose, with an inordinate pride of name and race as his predominating moral features. In reference to this family pride, we must notice one of the first of Chateaubriand's affectations and insincerities. He pretends to despise all such weakness; he loudly proclaims the hollowness of all such pretensions; he stigmatises them as odious in his "father, ridiculous in his brother, and too manifest even in his nephew;"—and he adds with some *naïveté*, "Je ne suis pas bien

sûr, malgré mes inclinations républicaines, de m'en être complètement affranchi, bien que je l'aie soigneusement cachée." So far is he, however, from being either free from this weakness or able to hide it, that he betrays it in his every page. He loses no occasion of enumerating his ancestral glories and connections; he describes with irrepressible self-glorification his entering the royal carriages and hunting with the king—privileges only granted to those of undoubted noble birth; he devotes a whole chapter to his pedigree; he returns to the subject again and again; when his father dies, he gives an extract from the mortuary register detailing in full all his titles and formalities; he assures us that "if he inherited the infatuation of his father and his brother," he could easily prove his descent from the Dukes of Bretagne, the intermingling of his blood with that of the Royal Family of England; and he adds a long note, with further particulars and *pièces justificatives*, at the end of his Memoirs. And then he descends to the unworthy affectation of apologising for these "*vieilles misères*" and "*puériles réci-tations*," on the ground that they are given for the sake of his nephews, "who think more of such matters than he does," and in order to explain the dominant passion of his father. "Quant à moi" (he says), "je ne me glorifie ni ne me plains de l'ancienne ou de la nouvelle société. Si, dans la première, j'étais le chevalier ou le vicomte de Chateaubriand, dans la seconde je suis François de Chateaubriand; *je préfère mon nom à mon titre.*"

The young inheritor of all these past and future glories suffered from a defective education and a neglected childhood. He passed some portions of interrupted years at the seminaries of Dol, Rennes, and Dinan successively, before which period he seems to have spent his time in wandering along the wild shores of Brittany, or playing with the village urchins of Saint-Malo. He read fitfully, but learnt nothing thoroughly. He gained the admiration of his instructors, he tells us, on account of his singular memory for words,—it seems to have been his one special faculty in youth;—but he adds characteristically, “One thing humiliates me in reference to this: memory is often the endowment of fools; it belongs usually to heavy minds, rendered yet more ponderous by the baggage with which they are overloaded.” He actually feels ashamed of possessing a good memory because he cannot have it all to himself, but must share the endowment with ungifted men! The remainder of his youth was passed principally in his ungenial home at Combourg, lost in idleness and reveries, roaming among the woods, gazing at sunsets, building castles in the air, and indulging in those vague, semi-erotic, semi-ethereal fancies, so common to imaginative minds at the opening of life; but of which—full of his notion that everything relating to him was anomalous and unique—he says: “I do not know if the history of the human heart offers another example of this sort of thing.” His sister Lucile, who seems to have been a charming person, was his sole companion and comfort

in this ungenial and unprofitable life. Even with her it was melancholy enough; without her it would have been insupportable. It nourished and enriched his poetical imagination, beyond question; but it nourished and consolidated all his moral failings at the same time—his *farouche* and sombre humour, his unamiable egotism, his slavery to passion and to fancy, and his normal attitude of self-study, self-wonder, and self-worship. His father rose at four o'clock, summer and winter; and his harsh voice calling for his valet resounded through the great house. At noon the family assembled for dinner in the great hall, previous to which hour they worked or studied in their own rooms, or were supposed to do so. After dinner the father went to shoot, or fish, or look after his farm; the mother went to her oratory; the daughter to her room and her *tapisserie*; and the son to the woods, or to his books and dreams. At eight o'clock they supped; then the father shot owls, and the rest of the family looked at the stars, till ten o'clock, when they retired to rest.

“The evenings of autumn and winter were passed in a somewhat different manner. When supper was over, and the four *convives* had returned from the table to the fire-place, my mother, with a sigh, threw herself upon an old couch, and a stand with one candle was placed beside her. Lucile and I sat by the fire; the servants cleared the table and retired. Then my father began his walk, and never stopped till bed-time. He wore an old white *robe-de-chambre*, or rather a sort of mantle, which I had never seen on any other man. His head, nearly bald, was covered with a great white cap, which stood straight up. When he walked away from the hearth, the large room was so dimly lighted by its solitary taper that he became invisible—his steps only were heard in the

darkness. Gradually he returned towards the light, and emerged little by little out of the gloom, like a spectre, with his white robe, white cap, and long pale face. Lucile and I exchanged a few words in a low voice while he was at the other end of the room, but we were silent the instant he approached us. As he passed he inquired of what we were speaking. Seized with fear, we made no reply, and he continued his walk. The rest of the evening nothing was heard but the measured sound of his steps, my mother's sighs, and the whistling of the wind. The castle-clock struck ten. My father stopped; the same spring which had raised the hammer of the clock seemed to have suspended his steps. He drew out his watch, wound it up; took up a large silver torch with a large wax taper, went for a moment into the little western tower, then returned, torch in hand, and went towards his bedroom in the eastern tower. Lucile and I put ourselves in his way, embraced him, and wished him a good night. Without replying, he bent towards us his hard and wrinkled cheek, proceeded on his way, and withdrew to the bottom of the tower, and we heard the doors close after him.

"Then the charm was broken; my mother, my sister, and myself, all transformed into statues by my father's presence, suddenly recovered our vitality. The first effect of our disenchantment was to produce a torrent of words. If silence had oppressed us, it paid dearly for it.

"The flood of words being exhausted, I called the chambermaid, and conducted my mother and sister to their apartment. Before I withdrew, they made me look under the beds, up the chimneys, behind the doors, and search the staircase, passages, and neighbouring corridors. All the traditions of the castle, its robbers and spectres, suddenly recurred to their memory. The people were firmly persuaded that a Count de Combourg, with a wooden leg, who died three centuries before, appeared at certain epochs, and that he had been met on the grand staircase of the tower: sometimes, also, the wooden leg walked by itself along with a black cat."

We may readily concede that a youth thus passed was not calculated to inspire any vivid love of existence, and we have no doubt also that Chateaubriand was constitutionally of a melancholic temperament;

but still that weariness and *ennui* of life which he so ceaselessly parades in his Memoirs becomes nauseous at last. It is thrust in our faces on all occasions, and without occasion : it is exaggerated, it is morbid, it is carefully fostered, it is profusely manured ; and it is never checked or modified by any Christian sentiment or any manly principle. Chateaubriand's early years were undeniably full of gloomy and depressing influences, but they were amply redeemed by subsequent successes. He achieved fame while still young ; he rose to a height of grandeur and renown, according to his estimate of such things ; he was loved by many and admired by all ; he lived long, he lived actively, he lived on the scene of the most thrilling events, and he lived through a period more replete than any other with interest and excitement. If he had been less of an egotist, or more of a Christian, he must have been thankful for life at least, even if he had not consciously enjoyed it. Yet the burden of his song is the same at every age. In the *Natchez* (one of his earliest works) he writes : " Je m'ennuie de la vie ; l'ennui m'a toujours dévoré : *ce qui intéresse les autres hommes ne me touche point.* . . . Je suis vertueux sans plaisir : si j'étais criminel, je le serais sans remords. Je voudrais n'être pas né, ou être à jamais oublié." In the *Mémoires d'outre Tombe* he writes, under the date of 1821 : " Religion à part, le bonheur est de s'ignorer, et d'arriver à la mort sans avoir senti la vie." Eleven years later, when he was sixty-four years old, he writes to a lady friend : " Puis-

sance et amour, tout m'est indifférent, tout m'importune. J'ai mon plan de solitude en Italie, et la mort au bout."

It must not be supposed that his youthful studies and reveries were wholly unproductive : he seems to have talked well when excited and sufficiently at ease to overcome his native shyness ; and his sister, struck with some remarkable indications of talent, persuaded him to write. He did so for a while ; then he became discouraged, threw his work aside, and grumbled at Lucile for having suggested it. Even then he thought only of fame, not of interest in his subject, nor of the simple expression of his sentiments and fancies. "J'en voulus à Lucile d'avoir fait naître en moi un penchant malheureux : je cessais d'écrire, et *je me pris à pleurer ma gloire à venir.*" He began by writing verses, as nearly all young men do ; and he would fain persuade his readers that so competent a critic as M. de Fontanes found them excellent. "J'écris longtems en vers avant d'écrire en prose : M. de Fontanes *prétendait que j'avais reçu les deux instrumens.*" Unfortunately for Chateaubriand, M. de Fontanes gave his own version of the matter to M. Villemain, showing that the poet must have magnified some enforced politeness into deliberate eulogy. The critic signalised in the verse of Chateaubriand a want of spirit and real poetry which surprised him : "Car, enfin" (said he), "à travers les énormités, il est admirable de créations de style dans sa prose : c'est toute autre chose dans sa poésie ;—on dirait qu'il se dédommage et qu'il fait

amende honorable de ses hardiesses par le prosaïsme et la timidité." \*

Meantime the young aspirant had embraced no profession, though he had dreamed of nearly all and was unfit for any. "His spirit of independence," he himself says, "rendered him averse from every sort of service ; *j'ai en moi une impossibilité d'obéir*. Les voyages me tentaient, mais je sentais que je ne les aimerais que seul, en suivant ma volonté." His father designed him for the navy, and sent him to Brest to prepare for his commission ; but he renounced the career for some unexplained cause, and returned to the paternal mansion. His mother wanted to make him a priest ; but Chateaubriand felt no vocation in that line, though some preliminary studies were undertaken, and he actually received the tonsure from the Bishop of Saint-Malo, as a step towards becoming at some future period a Knight of Malta. He at one time resolved to obtain some appointment in the East Indies, and his father consented to let him dispose of himself in this manner ; but months flowed by, and no active measures were taken to realize the scheme. At last the paternal patience was worn out : a com-

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\* *Villemain* (La Tribune : Chateaubriand), p. 17. In another part of his *Memoirs*, Chateaubriand, in reference to the novel and unclassic style of his earlier writings, observes : "Toutefois, mon ami (Fontanes), au lieu de se révolter contre ma barbarie, *se passionna pour elle*." On this M. Villemain remarks : "M. de Chateaubriand is wrong here. No one, as we can testify, was more thoroughly impatient of the affectation, barbarous or not, which disfigures *Atala* and *René*, but he was charmed with their beauties."—(p. 75).



mission in the army was obtained, and the future celebrity was sent off to join his regiment with a hundred louis in his pocket and a parting allocution, which was rather a scolding than a benediction. The young ensign presented himself at head-quarters, and for a while did duty with his corps: but he saw no service and learned no discipline, spending most of his time in Paris, watching the gradual opening of the Revolution. The state of affairs soon became uncomfortable for an officer of noble family in the service of the king; Chateaubriand appears to have been still too egotistical a dreamer to feel any absorbing interest in the great drama that was then evolving; he was seized with a fancy for discovering the north-west passage,—so at least he says; but probably he was only restless and adventurous. However, he sailed for America; renounced his alleged scheme on the first discouragement he met with; wandered a while in the prairies and the forests of the new world; gained a glimpse into the poetry of savage life, of which he made the most in *Atala* and the *Natchez*; and returned suddenly to France, with no definite reason or determinate purpose, on hearing of the king's flight to Varennes. One passage in the *Mémoires* relating to this period is so indicative of certain features of Chateaubriand, that we must turn aside for a moment to call attention to it. On the voyage out he had formed an intimacy with a fellow-passenger, an Englishman named Francis Tulloch, who seems to have possessed both talent and merit.

This was in 1791. Thirty-one years afterwards, in 1822, when Chateaubriand was at the summit of his worldly grandeur as ambassador to England, Francis Tulloch was living in Portland Place, just opposite to the official residence of his former fellow-traveller and intimate. He wrote a very friendly and courteous letter to Chateaubriand, informing him of their close neighbourhood, and saying that though of course *he* could not make the first advances towards the renewal of intercourse with so great a man, yet that, "on the slightest intimation from the ambassador of a wish to see him, he should be delighted to express, &c., &c." The letter was complimentary,—so Chateaubriand gives it a prominent place in his *Mémoires*: he quotes it "in proof of the accuracy of his recollection and the veracity of his narrative;"—and he then proceeds to some rather trite and feeble reflections on the fading of friendship and the loss of friends:—*he appears never either to have answered the cordial letter, or to have responded to the modest invitation of his former companion.* It was so much easier and more becoming to moralize over the fidelity of others than to give any pledge of his own.

Throughout this portion of his Memoirs, as, indeed, in nearly every volume, we find constantly recurring examples, and very nauseous ones, of his besetting weakness. He never misses an opportunity, in season or out of season, à propos and mal-à propos, of instituting not exactly comparisons but *rapprochemens* between himself and every great and notable man

whom he can in any way drag into the narrative. When he shakes hands with Washington, he cannot help contrasting the renown of the one with the *then* obscurity of the other, and surmising that the great American statesman probably forgot his existence the day after the presentation. When he describes his residence at the *Vallée-aux-Loups*, near Chatenay, he adds: "Lorsque Voltaire naquit à Chatenay en 1697, quel était l'aspect du cône où se devait retirer en 1807 l'auteur du *Génie du Christianisme*?" He cannot mention his birth without reminding us that, "twenty days before him, at the other extremity of France, was born" another great man—"Bonaparte." On occasion of his departure for America, he observes: "No one troubled himself about me; I was then, *like Bonaparte*, an insignificant ensign, quite unknown; we started together, *he and I*, at the same time; I to seek renown in solitude, he to acquire glory among men." He makes Mirabeau say to *him*, à propos to nothing, what we know he said to others in a natural context: "Ils ne me pardonneront jamais ma supériorité." And he adds *more consueto*: "Lorsque Mirabeau fixa ses regards sur moi, eut-il un *pressentiment de mes futuritions*?" Once more: the following paragraph is headed *Mort de mon Père*. "L'année même où je faisais à Cambrai mes premières armes, on apprit la mort de Frédéric II. Je suis ambassadeur auprès du neveu de ce grand roi, et j'écris à Berlin cette partie de mes mémoires. A cette nouvelle *importante pour le public*, succéda une autre

nouvelle, douloureuse pour moi," etc. Chateaubriand lost his shirts when campaigning with the emigrant army near Trèves: this reminds him (or makes him invent) that Henry IV. found, just before the battle of Ivry, that he had only five shirts left. He observes thereon: "*Le Béarnais gagna la bataille d'Ivry sans chemises; je n'ai pu rendre son royaume à ses enfans en perdant les miennes!*"\*

Chateaubriand returned from America as unsettled as ever in his mind, and poorer than ever in purse. Meantime the Revolution made rapid progress. The emigrant army of Condé formed itself on the left bank of the Rhine; nobles and royalists flocked to join it, as fast as they could contrive means of escape; and Chateaubriand, mindful of his birth and antecedents, and moved by an ill-considered feeling of honour, resolved to follow their example, though in his heart he neither completely embraced their political principles, nor in his conscience was at all satisfied as to the morality of the emigrant warfare. He makes no secret of this state of mind in his record of the discussions he held with Malesherbes upon the subject. But he had no money wherewith to carry out his half-hesitating purpose: his family could not furnish him with it: *he married in order to obtain it*. This, at least, is his own account of the matter, and we have never seen it contradicted. "*Il s'agissait de me trouver de l'argent pour rejoindre les Princes: . . .*

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\* See also his remarks on Canning à propos of the Literary Fund Dinner, ii. 76.

on me maria, afin de me procurer le moyen de m'aller faire tuer au soutien d'une cause que je n'aimais pas." His sisters arranged the affair. He tells us that he felt no vocation for matrimony—none of the qualities to make a good husband; *since* "toutes mes illusions étaient vivantes; rien n'était épuisé en moi; l'énergie même de mon existence avait doublé par mes courses; j'étais tourmenté par la muse." Nevertheless he told his sisters they might do as they liked. "Faites donc!" said he. Accordingly they found a young lady with a reputed fortune of twenty thousand pounds, who, in spite of her friends' opposition, consented to become Madame de Chateaubriand; and, we believe, notwithstanding mortal annoyances, never repented of her complaisance. She appears, both by her husband's account and by that of M. Villemain, and of others who knew her, to have been clever, lively, and spiritual, and a really affectionate and devoted wife. Admiring Chateaubriand vastly, but appreciating him little, and approving and agreeing with him scarcely ever; proud of his fame, but indifferent to literature, and never reading a line of his works,—the union must have been a curious, if not an ill-assorted one. He esteemed and respected, but does not pretend to have loved her; and, according to our notions, he neglected her shamefully. He deserted her almost immediately after their marriage, and abandoned her to all the horrors and perils of the Reign of Terror. He left her behind him when he went to England, and seems for a time to have

forgotten he was married ; he left her when he went as Secretary of Legation to Rome ; he left her when he went on a pilgrimage to the Levant ; in fact, he usually left her behind him whenever he went anywhere. She was a kind of *pied-à-terre* or furnished lodging, which he kept in Paris to be ready for him when he happened to return, after his restless wanderings. The few pages which he devotes to her in narrating his marriage are singularly cool and characteristic. He does full justice to her intelligence and character, and expresses himself grateful for her devotion and affectionate patience with his faults. He intimates that her virtues made her less easy to live with than his defects, but generously takes no merit to himself for his more *facile commerce* ; for he says, that “ resignation, general obligingness, and serenity of temper ”—which no one but himself ever dreamed of attributing to him—“ are easy to a man who is weary and indifferent to everything.” He then proceeds to speculate whether, possibly, after all, he may not have plagued her more than she plagued him ; and ends by a deliberate and earnest disquisition on the problem whether his marriage “ did really spoil his destiny.” “ No doubt,” he argues, “ I should have had more leisure and should have produced more ; no doubt I might have been better received in certain circles and among the *grande*s of the earth ; no doubt Madame de Chateaubriand often bothered me, though she never controlled me. But, on the other hand, without her I might have gone to the bad, like Byron ;

I might have become a disreputable old *débauché*; and after all, I am not sure that if I *had* given full scope to my desires, and led a life of vagabond *amours*, it would have 'added a chord to my lyre,' or made my voice more touching, or my sentiments more profound, or my tones more energetic or more thrilling." "Retenu par un lien indissoluble, j'ai acheté d'abord *au prix d'un peu d'amertume* les douceurs que je goûte aujourd'hui. Je dois donc une tendre et éternelle reconnaissance à ma femme, dont l'attachement a été aussi touchant que profond et sincère. Elle a rendu ma vie plus grave, plus noble, plus honorable, en m'inspirant toujours le respect, sinon toujours la force des devoirs."

Chateaubriand soon discovered that his wife's property, for the sake of which he had married her, was all but mythical. It had been secured on the domains of the clergy, and these domains had been confiscated by the nation. At all events, the funds, whether existing or not, were inaccessible. With great difficulty he borrowed ten thousand francs; and, as ill-luck would have it, while these were in his pocket, for the first and only time in his life, he was enticed by the fatal fascinations of the gaming-table. He lost all except fifteen hundred francs, and, in his confusion and distress of mind, he left these also in a hackney coach, and told his family that the *whole* sum had gone in this way. This portion, however, he recovered the next day, and with this he emigrated. The army of the Princes, ill-constituted and ill-commanded, was,

as is well known, promptly defeated and dispersed. Chateaubriand escaped to England, and there spent the next seven years in poverty, privation, and sometimes in actual famine, supporting himself partly by his pen, and partly by occasional remittances from abroad. Here he learned the tidings of his mother's imprisonment and his brother's death upon the scaffold, along with that of Malesherbes and several of his near connections. Part of this exile was spent in study, but more in aimless, though not wholly unprofitable, poetic reverie. Here he wrote, or at least prepared, the *Natchez* and *Atala*, and here he published his first work, *Essai sur les Révolutions*, a very crude performance, but displaying much miscellaneous, superficial, and undigested reading, and no small promise of future talent. The book was little known, and had no success—probably did not deserve any; though it made the author known among his fellow-exiles. He himself admits, in his bombastic way, that it was all but still-born: “Un ombre subite engloutit le premier rayon de ma gloire.”

Two episodes in this portion of his life are all that we need notice; but his mode of dealing with both speaks volumes as to the moral nature of the man. He had obtained, through Peltier's\* interposition; some archæological employment in the county of Suffolk. While in that neighbourhood, circumstances

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\* The same French publisher who was afterwards tried for a libel on Bonaparte; a charge which gave occasion to the well-known magnificent oration of his advocate, Sir James Mackintosh.



caused him to reside for some time in the family of a clergyman near Bungay, who had a charming wife and an only daughter. With the latter, then about fifteen, according to Chateaubriand's account (every part of this narrative, we may observe, comes from himself, and is coloured, if not perverted, by his peculiarities), he was in the habit of reading Italian; he listened to her music and directed her studies. An attachment sprang up between them, which was observed by the parents, who, anxious only for their daughter's happiness, and too liberal-minded to object to her marriage with a penniless exile, determined to offer him her hand. Chateaubriand's description of the scene in which the mother, herself still young and beautiful, makes him the proposal is disfigured by the bad taste and the disposition to unworthy allusions which is so offensive in several of his writings. "Elle était dans un embarras extrême. Elle me regardait, baissant les yeux, rougissant; *elle-même, séduisante dans ce trouble, il n'y a point de sentiment qu'elle n'eût pu revendiquer pour elle.*" Chateaubriand was stupified at the proposal; the recollection of his own abandoned wife flashed across him; he avowed his marriage; the mother fainted, and he fled back to London, full of remorse and a haunting half-poetic love. His fancy had been vividly excited, but it scarcely appears that his heart, if he had one, was really touched. The sequel of the story is, however, the characteristic portion. Miss Charlotte Ives,—this was the young lady's name,—when this early illusion had worn away,

married Admiral Sutton; and in after years, being anxious for the promotion of her sons, bethought her of applying to her former admirer, then ambassador from France to England, to use his influence with Mr Canning, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and about (as was supposed) to proceed to India as Governor-General. This was in 1822, twenty-seven years after the brief romance we have related. Accordingly she called upon him, and saw him twice. The narration is his own: we do not accept it as a true picture of the deportment of an English matron, but we give it as we find it. They spoke at length of past times and old tender memories, holding each other's hands. The fatuity of the grandee, the superb egotist, the *homme d'bonnes fortunes*, breaks out at every sentence. He asks if she had recognized him. "Elle a levé les yeux, qu'elle tenait baissés, et pour toute réponse, elle m'a adressé un regard souriant et mélancolique comme un long souvenir. Sa main était toujours entre les miennes." Then, after a few more questions:

"'Mais dites-moi, madame, que vous fait ma fortune nouvelle? Comment me voyez-vous aujourd'hui? Ce mot de *milord* que vous employez me semble bien dur.'

"Charlotte répliqua :

"'Je ne vous trouve pas changé, pas même vieilli. Quand je parlais de vous à mes parents pendant votre absence, c'était toujours le titre de *milord* que je vous donnais; il me semblait que vous le deviez porter; *n'étiez-vous pas pour moi comme un mari, my lord and master?*'

"Cette gracieuse femme avait quelque chose de l'Eve de Milton en prononçant ces paroles; elle n'était point née du sein d'une autre femme; sa beauté portait l'empreinte de la main divine qui l'avait pétrie."

They had still another interview, a parting one. Chateaubriand says it was painful on both sides. She gave him a packet of his old letters and some manuscript of his, observing, “‘Ne vous offensez-pas si je ne veux rien garder de vous.’\* Et elle se prit à pleurer.’” He then bids her adieu, and sets to work to analyze the feelings with which he regarded her then, as compared with his faint fondness twenty-seven years before, and concludes in this unseemly fashion: “Si j’avais serré dans mes bras, épouse et mère, celle qui me fut destinée vierge et épouse, c’eût été avec une sorte de rage, pour flétrir, remplir de douleur, et étouffer ces vingt-sept années livrées à un autre, après m’avoir été offertes.” We shall meet with more than one example, as we go on, of the same species of profound indelicacy.

The other incident of Chateaubriand’s London life to which we made reference was this. There is an admirable and most beneficent institution in this metropolis, known to most of our readers, called “The

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\* This remark of hers would seem to be a simple invention, a theatrical or sentimental *fib* of the ambassador’s. It would appear that Chateaubriand, having once got re-possession of these old, and probably compromising, documents (which the lady only intended to show to him), was far too shrewd to give them back again; for we find letters from her in the *Souvenirs de Madame Recamier*, more than once entreating that the packet she had so long cherished *might be returned to her*; and intimating also, not obscurely, that the interview we have narrated had not been as agreeable to her as her interlocutor represents it. She calls it “that *inexpressibly* bitter moment when I stood in your house an uninvited stranger;” and he evidently, though giving her politeness enough, did nothing for her son.

Royal Literary Fund." Its purpose is that of affording temporary aid to literary men and women who may be in distress or privation, but whose position and education are such as would render the receipt of open charity more painful than poverty itself. The assistance needed is therefore dealt out with all secrecy and delicacy, and after the most careful inquiry, by a permanent secretary, the chairman, and one or two members of the society, who are understood never to reveal the names of the recipients. In this way much good is done, much suffering relieved, and much sensibility soothed and spared. The members of this association meet once a year in force at a great banquet, where some one distinguished for rank or fame is usually selected to preside. In 1822, when Chateaubriand was ambassador in England, he was invited to attend this annual dinner, in his double capacity of eminent politician and celebrated writer. One of the royal dukes was in the chair, and the attendance was unusually graced by the rank and talent of the guests. Many speeches were delivered : when it came to Chateaubriand's turn, he passed a glowing eulogy on the institution ; and by way of illustrating the services which it rendered in modesty and silence to struggling genius, without distinction of sex or nation, he drew a graphic picture of a young foreigner, cast upon these shores, having nothing but his talents and his industry to support him ; striving, and striving long in vain, to earn a scanty subsistence by his pen ; and finally, when just about to give up

the conflict in despair, rescued by the agent of the society descending upon his garret unsolicited, like a saving and ministering angel. When he had heightened the effect of his portrait by all the colours his rich fancy could gather round it, he produced a most vivid and thrilling emotion in his audience by adding: "*This case was my own*: I was that unknown and destitute foreigner, five-and-twenty years ago, etc., etc." The effect was electric: everybody was taken by surprise: no one had ever heard the faintest rumour of the transaction; and all vied with one another in congratulating the society on having relieved so great a man, and lauding the ambassador for the "grandeur of soul" which did not shrink from such an avowal. "Happy," exclaimed Mr Everett, the American minister, on the occasion of another anniversary celebration,—"happy the institution which could give relief to such a man! happy the man magnanimous enough to come here afterwards and acknowledge it!" or words to that effect.

Remembering this touching scene, we opened the *Mémoires d'outre Tombe* with some curiosity, to read the narration of it there. Under the date of 1822, and in a portion of the autobiography *written at that period*, we find a record of this notable dinner given by the Literary Fund. It is mentioned by way of introducing a somewhat inflated compliment paid him on the occasion by Mr Canning, and some still more inflated reflections of his own on his juxtaposition with

so great a man ; \* *but not one word is to be found in reference to the story we have just given ;* not a hint of his ever having received such relief, or of having so “magnanimously” avowed it. On the contrary, he denies it by implication, observing that “*if the Literary Fund had existed when he came to London in 1793, it might perhaps at least have paid his doctor’s bill.*” † The Literary Fund *did* exist at that time, for it was founded in 1790. How are we to explain the irreconcilable discrepancy between the two statements ? The incident at the dinner could not have escaped his memory ; for the description of the dinner in his Memoirs must have been written within a few days of its occurrence, and he remembers perfectly the names and the language of his *convives*. Was it that he thought the acknowledgment of having received at any period, and under any circumstances, eleemosynary aid would not read well in the biography of so great a man ? Was he willing to confess it *viva voce*, as a mere *verbum volans*, which might be forgotten to-morrow, but unwilling to embody it in a work which was to make him, and to be itself, immortal ? Or was it, in truth, that no such relief had ever been afforded him ; that the idea of proclaiming it before a brilliant assembly had tempted

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\* “*Est-ce l’affinité de nos grandeurs, ou le rapport de nos souffrances, qui nous a réunis ici ?*” &c. (Canning had then undergone no *souffrances*.)

† He is careful also to assure us (ii. p. 86) that he had refused to accept the pecuniary assistance offered by the English Government at that period to the French emigrants.

him into a theatrical clap-trap: that he could not resist the desire to produce a momentary effect; that, in fact, the whole story was a histrionic lie, which he uttered on the spur of the occasion, but naturally suppressed in the record of his life? Neither explanation is creditable; but the last, we suspect, is the true one.

We are now arrived at the commencement of Chateaubriand's literary life, which ranged from 1800 to 1812, and which may be said to have been inaugurated by the *Génie du Christianisme*, though the *Essai sur les Révolutions*, which we have already mentioned, and *Atala*, of which we shall speak presently, were given to the world before his great work. This work, however, was the one which made his fame and fortune; and it is this to which he himself always refers as his title both to permanent glory and to the gratitude of his country and of Europe. It is important, therefore, if we would estimate him aright, to inquire a little into the character of the book, and the circumstances in which it originated. Like nearly all the men of note in France at the close of the 18th century, Chateaubriand was an unbeliever, not probably from any very profound inquiry or reflection, but still deliberately and avowedly. Many passages, as well as the whole tenor, of the *Essai sur les Révolutions*, proclaim this plainly enough. If any doubt, however, existed on this head, it would be set at rest by a

remarkable document which Saint Beuve has brought to light. There exists a copy of the *Essai*, annotated with various marginal remarks, additions, and corrections, prepared with a view to a second edition, which the author then hoped for. Among them we find the following. The original text of the *Essai* says: "Dieu, la Matière, la Fatalité, ne font qu' Un." Chateaubriand adds in the margin, "Voilà mon système, voilà ce que je crois. Oui, tout est hasard, fatalité dans ce monde; la réputation, l'honneur, la richesse, la vertu même: et comment croire qu'un Dieu intelligent nous conduit? . . . Il y a peut-être un Dieu, mais c'est le Dieu d'Epicure; il est trop grand, trop heureux pour s'occuper de nos affaires, et nous sommes laissés sur ce globe à nous dévorer les uns les autres." In another passage he writes, also in the margin, in reference to another life: "Quelquefois je suis tenté de croire à l'immortalité de l'âme, mais ensuite la raison m'empêche de l'admettre. . . . Ne désirons donc de survivre à nos cendres; mourons tout entiers, de peur de souffrir ailleurs." Again: his incredulity, and his reason for it, are summed up in this sentence; the *Essai* says: "Dieu, répondez-vous, vous a fait libre. Ce n'est pas là la question. A-t-il prévu que je tomberais, que je serais à jamais malheureux? Oui, indubitablement. Eh bien! votre Dieu n'est plus qu'un tyran horrible et absurde." The marginal note adds: "Cette objection est insoluble, et renverse de fond en comble le système chrétien. Au reste, personne n'y croit plus."



These comments were written some time in 1798. In July of that year his sister writes to him a pathetic letter announcing the death of his mother, and her deep grief for his errors and impieties, adding her own prayer that Heaven would enlighten him and make him cease to write. By the time the letter reached him, this sister also had ceased to breathe. The effect of this double exhortation on his mind must be given in his own words. In his *Memoires* he says :

“The filial tenderness I felt for Mme de Chateaubriand was profound. The idea of having poisoned the last days of the woman who bore me drove me desperate. I threw into the fire with horror the remaining copies of the *Essai*, as the instrument of my crime. I would have annihilated the work, if it had been possible. I only recovered from my grief when the idea struck me of expiating my first work by a religious one: *such was the origin of the Génie du Christianisme.*”

In the preface to the first edition of the work, he gives a similar account :

“My mother having been thrown into a dungeon at the age of seventy-two, died on a truckle-bed, to which misery had reduced her. The recollection of my *égarements* spread bitterness over her last hours ; and in dying she commissioned one of my sisters to recall me to the religion of my youth. My sister communicated to me these last wishes of my mother. When her letter reached me, she herself was no more. *Ces deux voix sorties du tombeau, cette mort qui servait d'interprète à la mort m'ont frappé. Je suis devenu Chrétien. Je n'ai point cédé, j'en conviens, à de grandes lumières surnaturelles: ma conviction est sortie du cœur; j'ai pleuré et j'ai cru.*”

His reason was not convinced, but his heart was deeply touched ; the conception of the work was like

a ray of light and peace to him; and its plan was in strict conformity with its origin. He threw himself with feverish enthusiasm into the undertaking; he read much, but he mused and meditated still more; a title was soon found, as we learn from a letter to Fontanes, and a title far more appropriate and just than the one he afterwards adopted. He writes; "I misinformed you as to the title of the work: it is to be called *Des Beautés poétiques et morales de la Religion Chrétienne, et de sa Supériorité sur tous les autres Cultes de la terre.*" This gives a very precise idea of the nature and object of the book. It is not a didactic or a controversial work. There is no logic and no sequence in it. It is a poetic rhapsody, of rare finish and elaboration of sentiment and fancy. It is Christianity, or rather the Catholic form of it, made graceful with every drapery, gorgeous with every colouring, attractive with every association, which vivid imagination and a rich and glowing eloquence could gather round it. Or, rather, it is a collection of beautiful and pathetic images and pictures drawn from all walks of thought and feeling, pressed into the service of religion, and bound together with a golden thread of faith. It contains much to please and elevate the pious, much to confirm the gratitude of the happy, much to soothe the sufferings of the wretched and the bereaved, much even to stimulate the enthusiasm of endurance and of sacrifice; but not an argument or a consideration to convince or touch the unbeliever. Indeed, we gather as much from the

author's own confession and analysis.\* He picked up many of the suggestions and much of the religious colouring of the work from a superficial perusal of the Fathers; the descriptions of Nature, he tells us, he extracted from *The Natchez* (a tale of savage life, which had occupied him for some years, and which was afterwards retouched and published); and his own idea of the character of the book may be learned from the significant fact that, in its original form, it

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\* "It was a mistake (he tells us in the Introduction) to endeavour to reply seriously to sophists (meaning *reasoning* unbelievers)—a race of men whom it is impossible to convince, *because they are always wrong*. From neglecting this consideration much time and labour have been lost. It was not the sophists that needed to be reconciled to religion; it was the world they had led astray. They had seduced it by assurances that Christianity was a worship sprung out of barbarism, absurd in its dogmas, ridiculous in its ceremonies, inimical to arts and letters, to reason and to beauty—a worship which had done nothing but shed blood, enthral the world, and delay the happiness and enlightenment of the human race. It behoved us, therefore, to show that of all religions that ever existed, Christianity is the most poetic, the most humane, the most favourable to liberty, literature, and art;—and that the modern world owes it everything, from agriculture up to abstract science—from hospitals for the miserable up to temples built by Michael Angelo and adorned by Raphael. It was necessary to prove that nothing can be diviner than its morality, nothing more lovely or more imposing than its dogmas, its doctrine, and its worship; that it favours genius, purifies taste, develops virtuous passion, gives vigour to the thoughts, noble style to the writer, perfect models to the artist; that there is no shame in believing in company with Newton, Bossuet, Pascal, and Racine; and finally, that we must summon all the fascinations of imagination and all the interests of the heart to the aid of that faith against which they had been armed. *This is the work I undertook.*" (Vol. i. p. 16.)

embodied his two celebrated romances, *Atala* and *René*,—romances which, with all their beauties, are assuredly not religious in their essence:—what of Christianity appears in them is the thinnest varnish in the one case, and a mere brilliant patch embroidered on the other. We confess ourselves quite unable to share the admiration expressed for the *Génie du Christianisme*, not only by Frenchmen generally, but even by such competent critics as Villemain and Saint-Beuve. No doubt it is full of poetic beauties, warmth of fancy, richness of colouring, and charm of style, though disfigured by frequent inflation and some deplorable specimens of puerility and false taste;—but it has none of the ring of true metal about it, to our ears; it reads throughout like the work, not of a believer, but of a man who wished to believe, who sought to find peace and joy—but, yet more, fame and literary success—in believing.\* It strikes us as the production (to quote the expression of a French critic) “d’une imagination qui s’exalte, d’une tête qui se monte, non pas d’un cœur qui croit;”—and several

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\* Some notion of the general character of the book may be given by looking over the titles of the chapters: *Qu’il n’y a point de morale s’il n’y a pas d’autre vie. Elysée antique. Jugement dernier. Bonheur des justes. Pourquoi les Français n’ont que des mémoires. Division des harmonies. Des ruines en générale. Effet pittoresque des ruines. Ruines des monumens chrétiens. Des cloches. Pompes funèbres des grands. Tombeaux antiques. Tombeaux modernes. Tombeaux chrétiens. Cimetières de Campagne. Tombeaux dans les Eglises. Saint-Denis. Epoux: Adam et Eve; Pénélope et Ulysse. Le Père: Priam. Amour passionné: Didon. Amour champêtre: Le Cyclope et Galatée, &c.*

incidental remarks by Chateaubriand himself appear to justify this somewhat harsh description. He confesses to the alternations of doubt and faith which disturbed him even during the composition of the work.\* When he speaks of the *Génie du Christianisme* in his Memoirs, and of the immense sensation it excited, it is never with the deep and modest gratitude of the pious Christian, sincerely thankful that he has been permitted and enabled to do service to his Master, nor even with the simple joy of the soldier who is delighted to have gained a victory for the good cause; †—it is always with the self-glorification of the *littérateur* who has made a grand hit and achieved an

\* “Quand les semences de la religion germèrent la première fois dans mon âme, je m'épanouissais comme une terre vierge qui, délivrée de ces ronces, porte sa première moisson. Survint une bise aride et glacée, et la terre se dessécha. Le Ciel en eût pitié, il lui rendit ses tièdes rosées; puis la bise souffla de nouveau. Cette alternative de doute et de foi a fait longtemps de ma vie un mélange de désespoir et d'ineffables délices.”

† In looking again over his *Mémoires* we have found one passage which may be considered an exception: we give it *quantum valeat*. It was written at the close of life. “On the supposition that my name will leave some trace behind it, I shall owe it to the *Génie du Christianisme*. Without deceiving myself as to the intrinsic value of the book, I recognise its accidental worth: it came at the right moment. On this account it gave me a place in one of those historical epochs, which, mingling the man with the events, oblige people to remember him. If its influence be not limited to the change which during forty years it has produced on living generations; if in those who come after us it should revive one spark of those truths which have civilised the earth; if the faint symptom of life now visible should be preserved through future years,—I shall die full of hope in the Divine mercy.” (Vol. ii. p. 221.)

unparalleled success. Not one emotion of simple disinterested piety can be discovered anywhere. "*La littérature*" (he says) "*se teignet des couleurs de mes tableaux religieux. . . . Le heurt que le Génie du Christianisme* donna aux esprits fit sortir le xviii<sup>me</sup> siècle de l'ornière, et *le jeta pour jamais hors de sa voie*: on recommença, ou plutôt on commença, à étudier les sources du Christianisme. . . . *C'est moi* qui ai rappelé le jeune siècle à l'admiration des vieux temples." In his account of the Congress of Verona, written in comparatively his old age, we find this remark: "Il nous était impossible de mettre aussi entièrement de côté ce que nous pouvions valoir; d'oublier tout-à-fait que nous étions *le restaurateur de la religion*, et l'auteur du *Génie du Christianisme*." And when, on the publication of *Les Martyrs* some years later, certain complaints were made in relation to the fancied heterodoxy of portions of it, Chateaubriand, with an indignation which tastes so much of the person and so little of the cause, exclaims: "Et ne voilà-t-il pas que les chrétiens de France, à qui j'avais rendu de si grands services en relevant leurs autels, s'avisèrent bêtement de se scandaliser."

Notwithstanding his tendency to self-laudation, however, Chateaubriand does not at all exaggerate the actual success of the work. It placed him at once on the pinnacle of fame. The truth was, that it appeared in the very nick of time. It was published at a moment of reaction. It caught the world on the

rebound.\* It delighted the most opposed classes, and aided the most diverse interests. It was published just as the Concordat was proclaimed, and the churches were about to be re-opened. Napoleon, who half-dreaded the effect of his convention with the Pope and his coquetting with the clergy on the allegiance of an unbelieving and mocking generation, was charmed at the advent of so unexpected and efficient an ally. The poor, the suffering, and the timid, who had been so long deprived of the consolations of religion, were beyond measure rejoiced to hear the old language once again. The noble families of the Faubourg Saint-Germain—to whom their religion was like their loyalty, a sort of family inheritance, a portion of their family pride, a thing that “belonged to good society,” and was more than ever cherished since infidelity and scepticism had been dishonoured by the embraces of a democratic *canaille*—recognised the aristocratic opinions, the *ton comme il faut*, and welcomed their fellow-noble with enthusiasm. Every one pressed round him to do him homage; and incense of all sorts was burnt before him till even he was almost satiated.†

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\* M. Villemain well describes the work: “Ce fut *la pensée du plus grand nombre* traduite par un homme de génie; ce fut un lieu-commun populaire embelli par une éloquence originale.” Vinet very felicitously styles him “the Poet-laureate of Christianity.”

† His *Memoires* contain one very *naïve* expression, extraordinarily characteristic of the false taste and inflation of sentiment which constantly interferes to spoil even his most natural moods. He tells he was anxious that his book should make “a great noise” in

This, however, was not his first literary success. A year previously, his faithful and sagacious friend, M. de Fontanes, had induced him to extract the episodic romance of *Atala*, and to give it separately to the world. The result amply justified the anticipations of the critic. To use an expression of Lord Byron, M. de Chateaubriand "awoke next morning, and found himself famous." The volume can be read from beginning to end in a couple of hours, so that a single day was sufficient to decide its fate. It was profusely advertised, and became instantaneously famous. It was not, indeed, by any means universally admired, but it was universally read. There were many different opinions, but no silence on the question. Chateaubriand in his *Memoires* has left us a very graphic and amusing account of its reception, and of the effect of that reception on himself. It was hailed with enthusiasm by the young and by the fair sex; but severely handled by grave Academicians. It was worshipped by the romanticists, but scouted by the classicists. Girls wept over it in the boudoir; dramatists ridiculed it on the stage. Parodies, caricatures, sign-boards, all helped to fill the public mind with *Atala*, *Chactas*, and the *Père Aubry*. "I saw" (says Chateaubriand) "on a little theatre of the Boulevards, my lady savage with a head-dress of cock's feathers,

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the world, in order that his mother (who was in heaven) might hear it! "Ce désir me venait de la tendresse filiale : je voulais un grand bruit, afin qu'il montât jusqu'au séjour de ma mère, et que les anges lui portassent ma sainte expiation."



talking to a wild man of her tribe about 'the soul of solitude,' in a style that made me perspire with shame. Young lovers at the *Variétés* were made to talk of alligators, swans, primeval forests, while their parents stood by fancying they had gone crazy. The Abbé Morellet, to cover me with confusion, got his maid-servant to sit upon his knee, in order to show that he could not in that position hold her feet in his hands, as I had described Chactas holding those of Atala during the storm. But all this only served to augment the excitement." His head, he confesses, was turned. He was intoxicated with success. "Je me dérobaï à mon éclat; je me promenais à l'écart, cherchant à éteindre l'aurole dont ma tête était couronnée. . . . Quand ma supériorité dînait à trente sous au pays Latin, elle avalait de travers, gênée par les regards dont elle se croyait l'objet. Je me contemplais, je me disais : C'est pourtant toi, créature extraordinaire, qui mange comme un autre homme." Altogether this chapter is one of the most natural and pleasing in his *Memoires*.

As *Atala*, though so short, is perhaps at once the best, the most complete, and the most characteristic of Chateaubriand's works, it is worth while to spend a few minutes in considering its peculiarities. It exemplifies nearly all his special merits and his special faults. The language is exquisitely choice and musical; the descriptions of nature are in the best style of gorgeous and artificial poetry; the sentiments, though not always simple or appropriate, are often touching and beautiful, and sometimes elevated. On the whole,

though full of charms, it is very young and very French,—we know not how else to describe it. The story is a sort of reproduction of *Paul and Virginia*; with the difference, that the lovers of Bernardin de St Pierre were colonists, and those of Chateaubriand are North American Indians. In simplicity, in pathos, in fidelity of colouring and costume, in correctness of taste, in everything except rich word-painting, the earlier romance has, in our judgment, the advantage. In purity of conception and delicacy of treatment, St Pierre, though somewhat morbid, is unquestionably far superior. The girls in both stories are correct in conduct; but the one is modest, while the other is only chaste. Atala is a young maiden of the tribe of Natchez, but of European origin by the father's side; Chactas is a young savage of another clan, whom she liberates on the eve of the day when he was about to be burnt alive, after the usual mode in which Indians treat their captives. The two young people fly together and wander for weeks in the forests and prairies, till they reach a missionary settlement. Atala returns the love of Chactas with an ardour yet greater than his own; but her mother having vowed her to celibacy in her cradle she dares not yield to their mutual passion, and when on the point of failing takes poison to save herself from breaking this vow. She confesses on her death-bed to father Aubry, a venerable priest, and dies in the midst of his exhortations and consolations. Chactas relates the story in his old age to René—*alias* Chateaubriand.

Such is the outline of the tale. But the tale is nothing, the painting is everything. That painting, while full of detached beauties, is also full of incongruities when looked at as a whole. We would willingly, as the author somewhere in his works advises, "abandon the small and easy criticism of faults for the larger and more difficult criticism of beauties;" but in the instance of *Atala* this is impossible, and would be unjust; for the beauties are beauties of detail, and the faults lie in the *ensemble* of the picture. The language, half simple, half imaginative, of savage life, is put on laboriously in patches; the sentiments, and often the expressions, are redolent of the most advanced, and even morbid, civilization; and the *jar* consequent upon the mixture is felt in every page. Thus *Atala* says of her mother's death: "Le chagrin d'amour vint la chercher, et elle descendit dans la petite cave garnie de peaux d'où l'on ne sort jamais;" but when describing her passion for Chactas, she uses this Rousseau-ish and Chateaubriand-ish language: "Sentant une divinité qui m'arrêtait dans mes horribles transports, j'aurais désiré que cette divinité se fût anéantie, pourvu que, serrée dans tes bras, j'eusse roulé d'abîme en abîme avec les débris de Dieu et du monde." Conceive such words or such thoughts in a young maid of the American forests! Then Chactas is always admiring and adoring "Nature:" the genuine child of nature never talks about nature at all. Chactas in one page describes simply enough, and as a savage might, the lovely hair

and eyes of his wood nymph ; but then goes on with this Parisian twang : “ On remarquait sur son visage je ne sais quoi de vertueux et de passionnée, dont l'attrait était irrésistible ; elle joignait à cela des grâces plus tendres, et une extrême sensibilité, unie à une mélancolie profonde, respirait dans ses regards.” The gem of the book is, we think, the discourse of the good old priest, when he is labouring to reconcile Atala to dying so young and so full of life and love, by depicting the miseries and disenchantments that so commonly are inseparable from continued years ; but though magnificent as a rhapsody on the “ vanity of human wishes,” its whole tone and tenor seem out of place in a cave in a primeval forest, and addressed to a simple savage maiden. He assures her that she loses little in losing life ; that cabins and palaces are alike wretched ; that everything suffers and everything groans here below ; and then adds this monstrous piece of bad taste, which all the entreaties of his friends could not persuade Chateaubriand to expunge : “ Les reines ont été vues pleurant *comme des simples femmes* ; et l'on s'est étonné *de la quantité de larmes* que contiennent les yeux des rois.”

We must quote a few more passages of this really beautiful discourse, in justice both to our criticisms and to the author we are obliged to treat so unceremoniously.

“ Est-ce votre amour que vous regrettez ? Ma fille, il faudrait autant pleurer un songe. . . . Atala, les sacrifices, les bienfaits ne sont pas des liens éternels : un jour, peut-être, le

dégoût fut venu avec la satiété, le passé eût été compté pour rien, et l'on n'eût plus aperçu que *les inconvéniens d'une union pauvre et méprisée* . . . . Je vous épargne les détails des soucis du ménage, les disputes, les reproches mutuels, les inquiétudes, et toutes ces peines secrètes qui veillent sur l'oreiller du lit conjugal. . . . Mais peut-être direz-vous que ces derniers exemples ne vous regardent pas ; que toute votre ambition se réduisait à vivre dans une obscure cabane avec l'homme de votre choix ; que vous cherchiez moins des douceurs du mariage que les charmes de cette folie que la jeunesse appelle amour ? Illusion, chimère, vanité, rêve d'une imagination blessée ! . . . . Si l'homme pouvait être constant dans ses affections, sans doute la solitude et l'amour l'égalerait à Dieu même ; car ce sont là des deux éternels plaisirs du grand Etre. Mais l'âme de l'homme se fatigue, et jamais elle n'aime longtemps le même objet avec plénitude. *Il y a toujours quelques points par où deux cœurs ne se touchent pas ; et ces points suffisent à la longue pour rendre la vie insupportable.*

“ Enfin, ma chère fille, le grand tort des hommes, dans leurs songes de bonheur, est d'oublier cette infirmité de la mort attachée à leur nature : il faut finir. . . . . L'amour n'étend point son empire sur les vers du cercueil. Que dis-je (ô vanité des vanités !), que parlais-je de la puissance des amitiés de la terre ? Voulez-vous en connaître l'étendue ? Si un homme revenait à la lumière, quelques années après sa mort, je doute qu'il fût revu avec joie par ceux-là meme qui ont donné le plus de larmes à sa mémoire : tant on forme vite d'autres liaisons, tant on prend facilement d'autres affections, tant l'inconstance est naturelle à l'homme, tant notre vie est peu de chose même dans le cœur de nos amis.”

The whole fitting criticism of *Atala* may be summed up in a few sentences of M. Vinet. “ This hybrid incoherent character shows itself throughout, but most especially in the colouring of the style, or rather in the promiscuous intermixture of colours, which mingle without blending. The East and the West, the present and the past, the *naïveté* of the savage and the morbid subtlety of the civilized Parisian, are cast pell-mell into the images and expressions of the

*dramatis personæ.* All this is unnatural and false ; and yet, we must admit, it is supportable enough. Everything is not well assorted ; but everything is brilliant, melodious, and sweet. There is such freshness and splendour in the inharmonious colours ; such music in the rich and gorgeous language. As a magnificent painter of the magnificence of nature, M. de Chateaubriand has no equal, and scarcely a competitor.\*

We have dwelt so long on these two most celebrated and most characteristic works of Chateaubriand, that we have no space for any details as to the remainder of his literary career. *René*—which originally and naturally formed an episode in his youthful romance of *Les Natchez*, and was forcibly transported thence into the *Génie du Christianisme*, where it first appeared—is a vivid but most painful delineation of a soul made wretched by vague yearnings and selfish discontent, unprincipled indolence, and unloving egotism ; in fact, a faithful picture of Chateaubriand's own youth. It has in it nothing noble, nothing manly, nothing vigorous or fresh ; but a sadder cry, a deeper groan, never issued from the hopeless abysses of an aimless and melancholy spirit. It is morbid to the very core : it is one of the most remarkable specimens of that "Literature of Despair" peculiar to our age, of which *Werther*, *Obermann*, and *Adolphe* are analogous productions.

It was in the year 1806 that M. de Chateaubriand

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\* *Etudes sur la Littérature Française au dix-neuvième siècle*, tom. i. p. 273.

conceived the plan of his great prose-poem *Les Martyrs*. He saw in the story of the early Christian sufferers for their faith, as he had before seen in Christianity itself, a grand field for poetry and romance, for descriptions of the beauties of nature, and the charms of elevated sentiment and passion. To imbue his mind with the needful local colouring, he planned that voyage to the East, of which he afterwards published so pleasing an account in the *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*. He would fain persuade us in his autobiography that he went thither in the spirit of piety, to weep at the foot of Calvary, and to bathe in the waters of Jordan; but in the preface to the *Itinéraire*, one of his real motives is avowed: "J'allais chercher des images: voilà tout." The other motive, perhaps the most powerful one, is obscurely hinted at in a later portion of his *Mémoires d'outre Tombe* (Venice, 1833), but was well known to his friends. He went in obedience to the exigencies of a charming person to whom he was then much attached, who sent him to gather that fresh glory which was needed thoroughly to win her heart, and promised to meet him at the Alhambra on his return. Of that meeting we have a romantic shadowing out in *Le Dernier Abencerage*, an exquisite little tale of Moorish chivalry. The passage in his *Mémoires* is as follows: "Have I told all the truth in my *Itinéraire* as to this journey? Did I really make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Christ in a spirit of repentance? *One sole thought possessed me*: I counted with impatience

the moments till its realization. On the deck of my ship, with eyes fixed on the western star, I demanded of it wings to speed me on my course, *de la gloire pour me faire aimer*. I hoped to find this at Sparta, at Sion, at Memphis, at Carthage, and to bring it back to the Alhambra. How my heart beat as I approached the coast of Spain! *Aurait-on gardé mon souvenir ainsi que j'avais traversé mes épreuves?"*

*Les Martyrs* appeared in 1809, but had far less success than the author anticipated, though more, in our opinion, than it deserved. It is a poem in every sense, but written in prose,—a mistake which causes all its extravagances and anomalies to stand out in disagreeable relief. Only verse, and verse of the highest order, could make such descriptions and rhapsodies harmonious. The work, like all Chateaubriand's, is replete with detached beauties, but every beauty is set in a framework of anachronisms and incongruities which overpower its fascinations. The whole conception of the work, too, is false in its foundation: the design was to contrast the two religions, Christianity and Paganism—the fresh infancy of the one beside the sunset death-bed of the other. But in executing this conception the author has fallen into the most fatal and unpardonable of all anachronisms—one of twenty centuries at least: he has contrasted, not the Christianity of Cyprian's with the polytheism of Diocletian's day, but the Catholicism of Bossuet with the mythology of Homer. He has fallen, too, into an error which, if not so scientifically heinous, is yet



more practically revolting. He has given us descriptions of heaven and its mysteries which, though modelled after the Apocalypse and the *Paradise Lost*, read like parodies on both. He follows, with mincing and unequal step, the most questionable flights of Dante and of Milton, shaming and caricaturing them as he goes along. The following—one of the most carefully-wrought passages in the book—will suffice to justify our criticism.

“Delicious gardens extend round the radiant Jerusalem. A river flows from the throne of the Almighty: it waters the celestial Eden, and bears on its waves the pure Love and the Wisdom of God. The mysterious stream separates into different channels which mingle and reunite again, and nourish the immortal vines, the bride-like lilies, and the flowers which perfume the couch of the bridegroom. The tree of life rises on the Hill of Incense; a little further the Tree of Knowledge spreads on every side its deep roots and its innumerable branches; hiding amid its golden foliage the secrets of the Divinity, the occult laws of nature, moral and intellectual realities, and the changeless principles of good and evil . . . Of the angels, some keep the 20,000 war-chariots of Sabaoth and Elohim; others watch over the quiver of the Lord, his inevitable thunderbolts, and his terrible coursers, which carry war, pestilence, famine, and death. . . . There is accomplished, far from the gaze of angels, the Mystery of the Trinity. The Spirit, ever ascending and descending between the Father and the Son, mingles with them in those impenetrable depths. The primitive Essences divide; the triangle of fire vanishes away; the oracle opens, and the Three Powers become visible. Seated on a throne of clouds, the Father holds a compass in his hand; a circle is beneath his feet; the Son, armed with a thunderbolt, is at his right hand; the Spirit rises at his left hand like a pillar of light.”

With such pictures—“poor fragments all of this low earth”—could Chateaubriand dream of rousing the pious imagination of Paris in the nineteenth century.

With the publication of *Les Martyrs* and the *Itinéraire*, followed somewhat later by *Le Dernier Abencerage* and *Les Natchez*, we may regard the literary phase of M. de Chateaubriand's life to have terminated. His subsequent publications *Etudes historiques*, *Congrès de Verone*, and the translation of *Paradise Lost*, were the productions, comparatively, of his age, and need not be more particularly noticed.

The political life of Chateaubriand belongs to the Restoration, but he made one or two episodical excursions into the domain of public affairs under the Empire. In 1803, after the completion of the *Concordat*, Napoleon resolved to send an Embassy to Rome, and nominated his uncle, Cardinal Fesch, as Minister, and Chateaubriand, then in the full bloom of his fame as author of the *Génie du Christianisme*, as Secretary of Legation. The appointment seemed a fitting one, and Chateaubriand accepted it as an appropriate testimony to his merits; but his elation was considerable, and he conducted himself as young men and vain men will do under such circumstances.\*

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\* There can be little doubt that he accepted the nomination gladly, and in the sincere hope of being able to render special services to the Church; but in his *Memoires* he endeavours to persuade us that he was most reluctant; conscious, he says, "que je ne vauz rien du tout *en seconde ligne*," but was induced to forego his objections by the representations of the Abbé Emery. But, as if he could never be consistent or able to see matters as they really were when himself was concerned, he goes on to say that his real determining cause was the failing health of his friend Madame de

He immediately became, in his own eyes, the soul and centre of the embassy, and relegated the Cardinal, in fancy, to a subordinate position; imagining that Nápoleon had intended him to do all the work, and his chief to be a mere *roi fainéant*—a sort of *nominis umbra*. He therefore preceded the ambassador to Rome, and, in defiance of all official etiquette and decorous reticence, procured an audience of the Pope, presented his credentials and proceeded to make good his position. The arrival of the Cardinal replaced him in his natural subordination, and reduced him to comparative obscurity. This was intolerable to a man of his insatiable vanity and extravagant expectations, and he complained bitterly of his disappointment. The secret official correspondence of the Cardinal, and the private letters of his secretary, during the whole duration of their ill-assorted union, are filled with reciprocal reproaches and complaints; and at length Chateaubriand so far forgot himself as to forward (through Madame Bacciochi, we believe) a long note to the First Consul, containing much political information and suggestions which ought to have been transmitted through the Cardinal, and many insinuations against the Cardinal himself, which ought never to have been transmitted at all. The truth was, that Chateaubriand was of all men the least fitted for a diplomatic post of any sort. He was too conceited,

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Beaumont, for whom the climate of Italy was recommended, and who agreed to accompany him if he went to Rome. "*Je me sacrifiai à l'espoir de la sauver.*"

intriguing, and insubordinate for a secondary position, and far too suspicious, irritable, and gullible through vanity, for a principal one. An ambassador should be keensighted, calm-tempered, firm, somewhat pachydermatous, and as free from weakness which foes and rivals can play upon as may be. Chateaubriand was susceptible, impulsive, unsociable, giving and taking offence with equal readiness, and as full of obvious and manageable foibles as any man that ever breathed. He soon grew sick of his situation. He considered the Cardinal to be an incapable fool, the Cardinal looked upon him as a meddling and intriguing upstart; the First Consul became weary of their squabbles, but was persuaded by the vigilant friendship of M. de Fontanes to anticipate Chateaubriand's intended resignation by appointing him Minister to the newly-constituted Republic of the Vallais. Chateaubriand returned to Paris on his way to his post, which, though really insignificant, was an apparent promotion; but, while there, was shocked and startled, in common with the rest of Europe, by learning one morning the seizure and execution of the Duc d'Enghien. In the first moment of horror and indignation, he sat down and wrote his resignation to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was a noble and generous impulse, and did infinite credit both to the feeling and the courage of the young diplomatist. For Napoleon, though not yet emperor, was on the point of becoming so, and was virtually all-powerful; and the man who, in defiance of all law and right, had just stained his

hands with the blood of a Condé, was not likely to hesitate in punishing any inferior victim who might brave or blame him. It was a period, too, in which civil bravery and independent conscience were at their lowest ebb in France. All honour, therefore, to Chateaubriand for his prompt and spirited proceeding; but why, in his *Mémoires*, should he seek to enhance the merit of the deed by speaking as if he alone of all existing Frenchmen was capable of such conduct, and as if all his friends were paralyzed with consternation at his audacity? \* Why, in relating an act which so much redounds to his glory, need he seek to monopolize that glory, and discolour facts that he may do so? "For many days," he writes, "my friends came trembling to my door, expecting to find that I had been carried off by the police. M. de Fontanes became nearly wild with terror at the first moment; he, like all my best friends, considered me shot." Yet Chateaubriand, when he wrote this, must have been fully conscious of its inaccuracy and injustice; for he knew that two days after the crime, when the *Moniteur*, by direction of Napoleon, had altered the wording of an address presented to him by M. de Fontanes as President of the Legislative Chamber, so as to give it the appearance of approving the murder, this same friend, whom he represents as wild with

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\* Why, too, spoil the record of one of the few single-minded acts of his whole life by hinting at a motive of vanity? Why the reflection, "En osant quitter Buonaparte, *Je me plaçais à son niveau?*"

fright, had the courage to insist on the public correction of the error. He relates himself also, in a later portion of his *Memoirs*, that a few months afterwards, when Napoleon had been crowned emperor, and was even more absolute and formidable than before, he said to Fontanes, with his customary brutality, "Eh bien, Fontanes, vous pensez toujours à votre Duc d'Enghien." His interlocutor was bold enough to reply in a tone of grave rebuke, "Il me semble que l'Empereur y pense autant que moi." In truth, Chateaubriand was far from being as unique as he fancied in his courage on that occasion. M. Suard, an old Academician, and then editor of a journal, *Le Publiciste*, on being desired by the minister of the day to "set public opinion right" on the subject of the official murder, sent this plain reply, at least as bold and honourable as M. de Chateaubriand's: "I am seventy-three years old, and neither my mind nor my conscience, any more than my limbs, have grown supple with age. The trial and execution of the Duke are proceedings which I deplore, and which contravene all my notions of justice and humanity. I cannot therefore 'rectify' an opinion which I share.

No one, however, ever doubted Chateaubriand's courage or high sense of honour in political affairs. He gave another proof of it in 1807, by publishing in the *Mercure*,—a literary paper of which he had become the editor,—an article containing, among other pungent reflections, the following famous passage, of which the writer was immensely proud:

“Lorsque, dans le silence de l’abjection, l’on n’entend plus retentir que la chaîne de l’esclave et la voix du délateur ; lorsque tout tremble devant le tyran, et qu’il est aussi dangereux d’encourir sa faveur que de mériter sa disgrâce, l’historien paraît, chargé de la vengeance des peuples. C’est en vain que Néron prospère ; Tacite est déjà né dans l’empire. . . . Si le rôle de l’historien est beau, il est souvent dangereux ; mais il est des autels comme celui de l’honneur, qui, bien qu’abandonnés, réclament encore des sacrifices ; Le Dieu n’est point anéanti parceque le temple est desert.”

So sunk was France then in slavery and silence, that a sentence like this was like the sudden sound of a trumpet in a Quakers’ meeting or at a funeral procession ; the excitement was extraordinary ; Napoleon was furious ; the *Mercure* was suppressed, and, according to the *Mémoires d’outre Tombe*, the audacious writer was ordered to be arrested. This, however, was never done—probably was never ordered. The sentences which introduce and close this episode in the Memoirs are too characteristic to be omitted. Chateaubriand begins the narrative by saying, “It was not in vain that I wore a countenance tanned by exposure to the sun (he had just returned from the East) ; I had not encountered the *wrath of heaven* (Anglicè, the heat of a Syrian summer) to tremble before the anger of a man. Si Napoléon en avait fini avec les rois, *il n’en avait pas fini avec moi*,” etc. And after describing the rage of the emperor, he concludes thus ; “Ma propriété périt ; ma personne échappa par miracle ; Bonaparte eut à s’occuper du monde : *il m’oublia*.”

But Chateaubriand’s real entrance into the arena of

political life was effected by his famous pamphlet, *Bonaparte et les Bourbons*; and a more splendid inauguration never man had. Like the *Génie du Christianisme*, this fierce and spirit-stirring invective came out in the very nick of time; like that production, it caught the tide on its turn; it gave utterance to the pent-up feelings of millions, decided the movements of the wavering, and clinched and whetted the passions of the exasperated and the wronged; it was written during the last struggle of Napoleon for existence and for empire on the soil of France; (the author tells us it was written amid mortal anxieties and in the greatest danger, with locked doors at night and with loaded pistols by his side;) it appeared when the allied armies were at the gates of Paris, when Napoleon was at Fontainebleau in the agonies of meditated abdication, and when the conquerors and the people were alike hesitating as to the government and the ruler they would choose. Never was a shot so opportune or so telling. By enumerating all the crimes and tyrannies of Napoleon, and painting them in colours and in traits that made the heart of the whole nation at once rage and bleed, it gave the *coup-de-grace* to the falling oppressor; and by appealing to all the ancient and long-dormant but not extinguished sentiments of loyalty and chivalry which were once so powerful among the French people, by pleading the old glories and the recent sufferings of the exiled race,—it went far to determine the counsels of the liberators and the liberated alike



in favour of what was, in fact, the only sound decision,—the recall of the Bourbons to the throne. Louis XVIII. may or may not have said, as Chateaubriand more than once asserts, that this pamphlet “was worth to him a hundred thousand men;” but if he did so, it was only a somewhat extravagant expression of the truth. As usual, however, Chateaubriand endeavours to monopolise *all* the credit of the event to which he was only one—though perhaps the chief—of the contributors; and he would fain persuade us in his *Mémoires* that even Talleyrand was in favour of a compromise and a regency:—Talleyrand, who had especial reason to hate and dread everything Napoleonic; Talleyrand, who so tersely urged upon the half-reluctant and still-admiring Alexander: “Louis XVIII. est un prince; Bonaparte est un prince:—tout ce qui n’est ni l’un ni l’autre n’est qu’un intrigue.”

In our judgment, this pamphlet is beyond question the best production of Chateaubriand’s pen, because it is by far the truest and most earnest. It is the utterance, somewhat excessive, perhaps, but not unwarranted, of the righteous and relentless indignation of a public man against perhaps the greatest public criminal of modern times, pointed and heightened by the smouldering fury of the private foe. It is concentrated passion, approaching to malignity, let loose in a cause which almost hallowed the emotion. The invective is splendid; the tone and language are throughout superb. From first to last there is scarcely

an ornament or a trope ; for once the author thought more of his subject than of himself—more of the wounds he could inflict than of the dazzle he could make. Here he fights like a gladiator in the arena of life and death, dependant on the keenness of his thrusts and the sharpness of his sword ; in all his previous displays he has been attitudinizing like a fencing-master on the stage, studying every posture, pausing at every instant to admire and point out how bright is his blade, and how skilful are his lunges and his guards. The pungency and effectiveness of the *style* are something unrivalled,—and herein, by the way, lay always Chateaubriand's chief force. His picture of the suffering caused by the conscription must have exasperated the feelings of every family in France nearly to fury. “ Les générations de la France étaient *mises en coupe réglée comme les arbres d'une forêt* : chaque année 80,000 jeunes gens étaient abattus. . . . On en était venu à ce point de mépris pour la vie des hommes et pour la France, d'appeler les conscrits la *matière première*, et la *chair à canon*. . . . Bonaparte disait lui-même ! J'ai 300,000 *hommes de revenu*.” We have no space to quote ; but all who wish to see the eloquence of invective carried to the very perfection of magnificence, should read the last few pages, beginning, “ Bonaparte est un faux grand homme ; ” and again the passage, “ Bonaparte n'est point changé : il ne changera jamais ; ” and that where he concludes, “ Que les Français et les Alliés reconnaissent leurs princes légitimes ; et

à l'instant l'armée, déliée de son serment, se rangera sous le drapeau sans tache, souvent témoin de nos triomphes, quelquefois de nos revers, toujours de notre courage, jamais de notre honte."

It has been objected to Chateaubriand that there was something ignoble and ungenerous in firing a shot like this, weighted with the accumulated animosity of years, into the flank of a falling foe, and in thus rejoicing over the defeat of a French ruler by foreign arms. The objection, we confess, appears to us quite unjust. Chateaubriand had opposed and condemned Napoleon in the height of his power; he had earned the right to attack him when and where he could; and the pamphlet was published at the first moment when publication was possible. The crisis was perilous and decisive; hesitation prevailed everywhere; a little more timidity on the part of the Allies, a little more moderation on the part of Napoleon, and a compromise fatal to all parties might have been accepted; and what then would have been the position of Chateaubriand? He did excellent service; he encountered considerable risk; and we think he would have been guilty of a dereliction of duty if any false notions of generosity had withheld him from striking at so critical a conjuncture. It was simply impossible, too, *not* to welcome the Allies; they were felt by the whole nation to be deliverers; Napoleon had come to be execrated as much as he was feared;—he was, in the eyes of Frenchmen, less their sovereign than their jailor and oppressor. A far graver and more real

offence, in our estimate, was his repudiation of these sentiments in later years, when his loyalty was somewhat cooled under the influence of disappointed vanity, and when he had to *poser* in a befitting attitude before a public whose feelings, like his own, had undergone a change. At the time, in 1814, he hailed the success and the arrival of the allied invaders with delight; every page of the pamphlet bears witness to his joy at their approach, his gratitude at their behaviour, and his alarm lest they should listen to a compromise, and leave Napoleon on the throne of a diminished kingdom. It was natural he should feel thus; he had a right to feel thus. But how, then, could he venture in his *Mémoires* on the falsehood of describing himself as wretched and humiliated on seeing the entrance of the allied sovereigns? “Je les vis défilér sur les boulevards, *stupéfait et anéanti* au dedans de moi, comme si l'on m'arrachait mon nom de François, pour y substituer le numéro par lequel je devais désormais être connu dans les mines de la Sibérie” (iii. 348).

So powerful and well-timed a production as *Bonaparte et les Bourbons*, coming from a man so eminent in literature, at once brought Chateaubriand into contact with the restored monarch and his court, and enrolled him for the future on the list of active politicians and possible ministers. But it appears to have been immediately and instinctively felt that with all his genius he was too little of a practical man for the crisis. He received many compliments, but no place; and the vacant embassy to Sweden, to which he was

at length nominated, owing to the untiring zeal of one of his devoted admirers, Madame de Duras, was far from satisfying his expectations. He speaks of the appointment with considerable bitterness; and before he could take it up, the return of Napoleon from Elba once more scattered the whole royalist party to the winds. M. de Chateaubriand followed his master to Ghent, and there became one of the advisers and nominal ministers of the fugitive king and the mock court. There, though he had nothing to do as minister, he was active with his pen. He presented sagacious memorials to Louis XVIII., and wrote brilliant articles in the *Moniteur de Gand*: but the *exigeant* vanity and hauteur of his character made themselves unpleasantly felt at the council-board; his acute sovereign soon took his measure, though perhaps he valued his talents too little and was irritated by his manners too much. "He was, I admit," says M. Guizot, who knew him well both then and afterwards, "an inconvenient ally; for he pretended to everything, and was hurt and offended at everything: on a level with the finest minds and the rarest geniuses, it was his illusion also to think himself the equal of the most consummate statesmen; and his soul was filled with bitterness because men would not allow him to be the rival of Napoleon as well as of Milton. Earnest men, and men of the world, would not lend themselves to this idolatrous folly; but they underestimated his real power, and forgot how dangerous he might be."

Under the second restoration, the position of M. de Chateaubriand was anomalous and painful. Unpopular at court ; feeling himself neglected and postponed to men in all respects inferior to himself ; indignant at the King for admitting into his Cabinet such feeble favourites as Blacas, and such abandoned intriguers as Fouché ; sharing all the angry and vindictive passions of the ultra-royalists, while holding all the constitutional doctrines of the liberals,—he found himself in a state of inconsistent and universal opposition. Discontented with every one and objecting to everything, he struck right and left impartially, if not indiscriminately. Nominated to the Chamber of Peers in that difficult and embittered conjuncture, he fought much like a wild horse, biting those before him, kicking those behind him ; insisting vehemently on the liberty of the press ; contending no less vehemently the next moment for the removability of the judges ; bent alike on enforcing all his own views of freedom, and on crushing his enemies, if need be, by all the resources of despotism ; labouring with equal zeal to re-establish the old legitimate monarchy of France, and to confine that monarchy within the limits of the English constitution. The fact was, that then, as always, he was obeying his instincts, which were strong and steady,—not his convictions, which were always weak and wandering. He wished for a powerful government, provided he might be its chief ; and he wished for a free press, because he was sure always to be its brightest ornament and its supreme director. The

world was to be so organised as best to bring out the faculties and the grandeur of François-René de Chateaubriand. From 1816 to 1820 Chateaubriand, partly in the Chamber, but still more in the journals, may be regarded as the leader of the opposition ; and his chief sin in those days was, that, while all wise and good men were doing their utmost to smooth down the still-rankling animosities of the past and to reconcile parties and hostile men by moderation and by compromise, Chateaubriand was the declared enemy of all moderation and all compromise ; he sought to excite passions, not to allay them ; his warfare was violent and bitter, and his language sometimes utterly atrocious,—as when he endeavoured to associate the quiet and modest Decazes, just then falling from power, with the murder of the Duc de Berry, saying “ses pieds ont glissés dans le sang.” He inaugurated the campaign by publishing his *Monarchie selon la Charte*, in which, with the greatest clearness and brilliancy, he expounds and enforces the advantages of parliamentary government and the sole responsibility of ministers ; while mixing with his wisdom some singular inconsistencies, which laid him open to severe retort, and showed how imperfect and *unthorough* was his political philosophy. This work gave great offence to the King, and an abortive attempt was even made to suppress it and to prosecute the author. Shortly afterwards Chateaubriand set up *Le Conservateur*, a journal of his own, in which he displayed wonderful skill and vigour as a polemic,—skill and

vigour, however, not great enough to conceal for one moment, or to excuse to any honest mind, the bitter personal feeling from which they drew their inspiration. He says, "The revolution wrought by this journal was unexampled: in France, it changed the majority in the two Chambers; abroad, it transformed the spirit of the Cabinets of Europe." Without echoing this somewhat extravagant self-glorification, there can be no doubt that it produced a vast effect on the state of parties, and that to it was mainly due the advent of M. de Chateaubriand and his friends to power. M. de Villèle and M. de Corbière entered the Cabinet, and Chateaubriand was appointed ambassador to Berlin. The next year their party was triumphant in the Chambers and in the Government; M. de Montmorency became Minister for Foreign Affairs, and to Chateaubriand fell the gorgeous prize of the embassy to England.

One might have fancied that so eminent a post—the highest in the diplomatic world—would have satisfied for a time even his restless and exacting ambition. It certainly gratified his vanity in no ordinary measure; and in his *Mémoires* his delight breaks out in a fashion which, but for the incurable bitterness and affectation mingled with it, would be almost that of a child or a *parvenu*. But the delight of a child is simple: that of a *parvenu* is bombastic:—Chateaubriand's is sour, pretentious, *peacockish*, and pettish, with assumed contempt,—the outpouring of a miserable and devastated spirit, insisting on everything



and satisfied with nothing. His own account so paints himself that we must quote it at some length :

“Thirty-one years after sailing for America, a simple ensign, I embarked for London with a passport thus conceived: ‘*Laissez passer* his Lordship Vicomte de Chateaubriand, Peer of France, Ambassador to his Britannic Majesty, &c.’ No personal description; *ma grandeur devait faire connaître mon visage en tous lieux*. A steam-boat, chartered for me alone, brought me from Calais to Dover. On landing, on the 5th April 1822, I was saluted by the guns of the fortress. An officer came from the commandant to offer me a guard of honour. The landlord and waiters of the *Ship Inn* came out to receive me, with heads bare and arms by their side. The mayoress invites me to a *soirée* in the name of the most beautiful ladies of the town. An enormous dinner of magnificent fish and beef restores *M. l’Ambassadeur*, who had no appetite, and was not at all tired. Sentinels stood at my door, and the people shouted huzzas under my windows. . . .

“The 17th of May 1793, I had disembarked an obscure and humble traveller at Southampton. No mayoress noticed my arrival; the mayor gave me a *feuille-de-route*, with an extract from the Alien Bill, and a personal description: ‘François de Chateaubriand, French emigrant, five feet four inches high, thin, brown hair and whiskers.’ I shared a conveyance of the cheapest sort with some sailors on leave; I entered the city where Pitt reigned, —poor, sick, and unknown, and lodged for six shillings a month in a garret in Tottenham-Court Road.

“Now, however, obscurity of a different sort spreads its gloom over me in London. My political position overshadows my literary renown: there is not a fool in the three kingdoms who does not think more of the ambassador of Louis XVIII. than of the author of the *Génie du Christianisme*. . . . How I regret, in the midst of my insipid pomp, the tears and tribulations of my early years in England! . . . When I come home now in 1822, instead of being received by my friend in our miserable attic, and sitting on a flock-bed, I have to pass through two files of flunkeys, ending in five or six respectful secretaries; and I reach at last, overwhelmed with *Monseigneur, My Lord, Your Excellence, Monsieur l’Ambassadeur*, a drawing-room all carpeted with silk and gold. O gentlemen, let me alone, I entreat you. Be quiet with your *My Lords*.

'The Marquis of Londonderry is coming,' you say; 'the Duke of Wellington has asked for me; Mr Canning seeks me; Lady Jersey waits for me at dinner with Mr Brougham; Lady Gwydyr expects me at ten o'clock at her opera box; and Lady Mansfield, at midnight, at Almack's!'

"Have pity on me; where shall I hide myself? who will deliver me? who will rescue me from these persecutions? Return, return, ye charming days of misery and solitude," &c., &c.

And so he goes on for some pages.

A little further on, in the same volume, while describing the Canadian forests, he breaks off thus: "And who is the monarch whose rule now replaces that of France over these regions? *He who yesterday sent me this note:—*

'Royal Lodge, Windsor.

'MONSIEUR LE VICOMTE,—I am ordered by the King to invite your Excellence to dinner and a bed here on Thursday next.

'FRANCES CONYNGHAM.'

This polite note of Lady Conyngham, thus lugged in by the head and shoulders, to show us how familiar he had become with the great, is greeted by the following piece of inflated affectation in the richest style of parvenuism: "Il était dans ma destinée d'être tourmenté par des princes!"

In the next volume we find a parallel passage:

"Those who read this part of my Memoirs may have observed that I have interrupted them twice,—once to give a great dinner to the Duke of York, brother of the King of England; the other time to give a *fête* on the anniversary of the restoration of the King of France. *This fête cost me forty thousand francs.* Peers and peeresses of the British Empire, ambassadors, and foreigners of distinction filled my splendidly-decorated rooms. My table glittered with glass, gold, and porcelain, and was covered with all that was

most delicate in food, wine, and flowers. Portland Place was thronged with brilliant equipages. The best music of Almack's charmed *the fashionable melancholy of dandies and the elegant reveries of pensively-dancing ladies*. The Opposition and the Ministry came to a truce in my halls; Lady Canning [who did not then exist] talked with Lord Londonderry, and Lady Jersey with the Duke of Wellington. Monsieur [Charles X.] who complimented me on the sumptuousness of my entertainments in 1822, never dreamed in 1793 that there lived near him a future minister who, *waiting for his grandeurs*, was then fasting in a churchyard, as a penalty for having been faithful to his prince."\*

The position of ambassador in London, brilliant as it was, could not long satisfy him. He pined to be in a brighter scene, and more immediately in contact with the centre of political action. At this period the uncured folly of the restored despots was causing disturbance in various parts of Europe, and in Spain the Cortes and the sovereign were in open hostility. A congress of sovereigns and plenipotentiaries was to meet at Verona to discuss the perils of the time, and Chateaubriand longed to be among them, a conspicuous figure in the brilliant assemblage. Montmorency, the Minister for Foreign affairs, was going as the representative of France, and neither needed nor much fancied so clever and unmanageable a colleague. But the Ambassador persisted and put in action every means of influence he possessed. He applied to Montmo-

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\* Chateaubriand appears to lose his head whenever he has to speak of his personal relations to royalty. In mentioning the transference to Saint-Denis, in 1815, of the mutilated remains of the royal family, he writes: "Among these bones I *recognised* the head of the Queen (who had been decapitated in 1793) *by the smile which she had given me at Versailles!*" (iii. 402.)

rency direct : “ Je pense ” (he says) “ qu’il est bon pour vous et pour moi que vous me mettiez en rapport direct avec les souverains de l’Europe : *vous complèterez ainsi ma carrière*, et vous m’aurez toujours sous la main pour vous faire des amis et repousser vos ennemis.” He pressed the same demand unremittingly upon Villèle, then virtually chief of the Cabinet, and he urged Madame Récamier to use all her skill in persuasion to obtain for him the bauble on which he had set his heart. He set Madame de Duras also to work for the same end. His pertinacity was successful, and he went to Verona to *pavoneggiarsi*, as the Italians say, among the congregated grandeurs of the world. When there, as we learn from his own and Montmorency’s correspondence with Madame Récamier, as well as from other more formal sources, his conduct was not that either of a loyal colleague or a faithful plenipotentiary. His vanity had been more irritated by the opposition which his appointment had met with in the first instance than gratified by his subsequent success. He was sulky with Montmorency and disobedient to Villèle. He had his own notions of what France ought to do, and had no notion of obeying the instructions of his government. It was not for Villèle to direct *him*, Chateaubriand, nor for Montmorency to control him ; he was abler and greater than either, and was determined to follow his own independent course. Few points in his career are less to his credit as a man of honour and of principle than his conduct throughout all these transactions. He appears to have

deceived both his colleague and his chief. The Holy Alliance wished to put down the Spanish Revolution by force, and to use the arms of France for this purpose. M. de Villèle was very unwilling that France should be so used, and instructed his plenipotentiaries not to lend themselves to any such result. M. de Montmorency, a pious zealot and a royalist *par excellence*, was anxious to interfere by arms in the affairs of Spain as a matter of high principle. M. de Chateaubriand, pretending to agree with Villèle, was in his heart even more anxious for a war in Spain than Montmorency, though for a different motive, as he afterwards repeatedly avowed, and gloried in avowing. He cared comparatively little, almost nothing, indeed, about the respective merits of the King and the Cortes in their civil strife; he desired only a war in which the armies of France, by an easy and certain victory, should restore the tarnished lustre of their military fame. This unprincipled view of matters we take from his own impudent confession, or rather from his own immoral boastings. He wished to send French troops *somewhere*; it mattered little where. "L'idée de rendre de la force et de l'éclat à nos armes me dominait toujours," he says in 1822.\* Early in that year he urged Montmorency to send troops into Piedmont, reminding him that when at Berlin the previous year he had endeavoured to persuade his predecessor to march an army into Savoy, when an occasion

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\* Mémoires, iv. 181.

appeared to present itself for interference. Now, since the Italian opportunity had been lost, he was determined that the Spanish opportunity should be made use of, in spite of the objection of his chief, and without reference to the righteousness of the cause.\* “*My Spanish war, the great political event of my life*” (he writes twenty-three years later), “was a gigantic enterprise. Legitimacy for the first time smelt powder under the white flag, and fired its first shot after those shots fired under the Empire which the latest posterity will hear. To march over Spain at a single step, to succeed on the same soil whereon the armies of so great a conqueror had experienced such sad reverses, *to do in six months what Napoleon had not been able to do in seven years*,—who could have aspired to effect such a marvel? Nevertheless, *this is what I did.*” It is pretty clear now, from authentic documents relating to the secret history of that time, as well as from Chateaubriand’s own Memoirs, that the French invasion of Spain (for a war it scarcely can be called) was concocted between the Emperor Alexander and the French plenipotentiary, in opposition to the Cabinets both of London and of Paris.

And now comes the meanest, if not the most immoral, part of the transaction. Montmorency returned

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\* In one of his letters to the President of the Council from Verona, he writes : “C’est à vous à voir si vous ne devez pas saisir une occasion, peut-être unique, de replacer la France au rang des puissances militaires, et de *réhabiliter la cocarde blanche* dans une guerre courte et presque sans danger.”

to Paris, leaving Chateaubriand still at Verona. Villèle received him very coldly, in consequence of his having, contrary to his instructions, almost pledged France to interfere by force in Spain. It soon became evident that the Minister for Foreign Affairs, differing so widely from the President of the Council on so important a question, could not satisfactorily continue to hold office under him. M. de Montmorency resigned his post accordingly. M. de Chateaubriand who while at Verona had, unknown to his colleague, corresponded privately with M. de Villèle, and who, on this same question, differed from Villèle even more widely and more resolutely than Montmorency had done, after a few decent hesitations, *succeeded the latter as Foreign Minister*. Nay, more, in his private correspondence he had more than once hinted to Villèle his willingness to accept this succession to a not then vacant heritage. The sad truth is, that Chateaubriand's vanity and ambition were too selfish and too grasping to permit him to be perfectly a gentleman or a man of honour in his relations either with ladies or with colleagues. Having entered the Cabinet on the understanding that he agreed with Villèle and disagreed with Montmorency as to the Spanish war, he set himself to work to promote that war as earnestly as Montmorency could have wished, and took to himself the entire credit of its inauguration and its success. Villèle, seeing it at last to be inevitable, made no further opposition, and having little *amour propre*, did not dispute its questionable glories with his insatiable and restless colleague.

But it soon became evident that Chateaubriand was almost as dangerous and as uncomfortable in as out of power, and would be not more loyal to Villèle than he had been to Montmorency. The King, too, could not endure him. After some months of discomfort, the explosion came. The Ministry brought forward a plan for converting the five per cents. into three per cents., with Chateaubriand's concurrence in the council: so at least his colleagues declared. But when the measure came on for discussion in the Chambers, the Opposition was found far stronger than any one anticipated. Chateaubriand, seeing this, sat gravely silent in public, but was open-mouthed against the scheme in private. Villèle was not a man to put up with such behaviour. Chateaubriand was summarily dismissed, and by an unlucky accident, in a manner which seemed both brusque and insulting. He received his *congé* only as he was entering the council-chamber. He retired furious and baffled, not into private life, but into the most virulent and vicious opposition, to the regret of his best friends. For four years he carried on, chiefly in the columns of the *Journal des Debats*, an unrelenting war against the Minister who had dismissed him, becoming in the course of it almost unconsciously the head of the Liberal opposition. In 1828 he triumphed, and M. de Villèle fell from power! but Chateaubriand did not succeed him. Charles X. liked him even less than Louis XVIII. had done; so vigorous an employer and champion of the liberty of the press was not the man to find favour with the monarch who



was already longing for the *Ordonnances*. It was necessary, however, to find some post for so formidable and so effective a polemist; so the Ministers offered him the embassy to Rome. He wished much for this post, but there was one difficulty in the way. It was held by one of his ostensible and most generous friends, the bosom friend also of Mme Récamier, the Duc de Laval, who had resided there long, and was by no means willing to quit. Chateaubriand made some decorous and deprecatory hesitations, as he had done in 1823; but it was evident that he was bent on Rome, and Mme Récamier was employed to smooth the rugged path. The Duc de Laval was the more disinterested of the two; He went to Vienna, and Chateaubriand superseded one friend at the Papal Court, as he had before superseded another at the Foreign Office. This proceeding, which was in harmony with the rest of his political career, was his last act. The following year, when the Polignac Ministry came into power, disgusted alike at the men who were nominated and at his own exclusion, he sent in his resignation and retired.

We have said little or nothing of the private and domestic life of M. de Chateaubriand; and, in truth, there is not much to say. He was never genial nor social; he hated both the effort and the constraint of general society, and, except in a circle of a few intimate adorers, he was usually silent, gloomy and abstracted. When he talked, however, he talked, as

might be expected, with much brilliancy. Among his own sex, it is probable, no eminent or attractive man had ever so few friends. He had too cold a heart, too absorbing an egotism, too irritable a pride, and too biting a tongue, either to love or be loved much. In reference to his relations with the other sex—a subject which commonly fills so large a space in the biographies of remarkable Frenchmen—the *Mémoires d'outre Tombe*, without being exactly honest, are, if we except one or two very unpleasant and unwarrantable hints, decorously discreet. We shall imitate that discretion; though a few words are needed to prevent misconception, of Chateaubriand's character on this point. Of his long, pure, and honourable friendship with Mme Récamier the *Souvenirs* of that unique and admirable woman present a most pleasing picture. All his intimacies, however,—and he had many,—were neither so amiable nor so irreproachable. Those who knew him well say that he treated women, as he treated everything else in this depreciated world, with a superb and commanding egotism. Sought and worshipped by many women of the finest qualities, and exercising over them, when he pleased, a singular and irresistible fascination, he was yet always the tyrant, never the slave. He gave little and exacted much, or rather he conceived that quality made up for quantity, and that the little he gave was in reality more than all that could be lavished on him in return. At the age of sixty-four he writes with *naïve* conviction to a lady whom he invited to meet him in

Switzerland, "that he would give her more in one day than others in long years;" and as, in spite of this assurance, she failed at the rendezvous, he tells her, "Vous avez perdu une partie de votre gloire; il fallait m'aimer, ne fut-ce que par amour de votre talent et l'intérêt de votre renommée."\* What he sought and found in love was not the affection of this or that woman in particular, but the flattery of his vanity and the distraction of his *ennui*—the excitement, the dreams, the stir of the imagination, the momentary revival of old enchantments, without which life was to him a desert and a burden. We should have fancied that he must have been a most tormenting and disappointing lover; yet the ladies whom he distinguished never complained of him; they seem all to have taken him at his own valuation, and done homage at his feet. Even Madame Récamier, sought and worshipped as she had been all her life by the most agreeable and remarkable men of the age, gave Chateaubriand's pre-eminence over them all; and though his turbulent, exclusive, and exacting temper caused her at first infinite vexation and distress, and once obliged her to absent herself from him and from Paris for a time, yet she could not shake off the fascination; it ended in her forgiving him and taming him, and devoting herself to him, with a rare and beautiful fidelity, through long years of decay. For nearly a

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\* Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries*, ii. 126.

quarter of a century, with occasional interruptions by absence, he wrote to her every morning and visited her every evening; and she closed his eyes in death, at the age of eighty, when her own had been long sealed in blindness.

We have now followed this prominent figure of the first half of our century through all the various phases of his existence—as youthful wanderer, literary celebrity, minister and politician, husband, friend, and lover; and a more strongly-marked or consistently-preserved individuality we never met in history. He was the same man at eighteen as at eighty; the same in obscurity as in fame; the same in politics as in love; never simple, never natural, never true; absorbingly selfish, incurably affected; the wretched victim of insatiable yearnings and eternal discontent. Probably the only thoroughly sincere thing about him was his desolate *ennui* and weariness, or rather disgust, of life. In his earliest works, *René* and *Les Natchez*, he speaks with bitter contempt of those whom suffering and reflection “have not cured of the *mania for existence* ;” eight years before his death he writes thus :

“J’ai fini de tout et avec tout: mes mémoires sont achevés. Je ne fais rien; je ne crois plus ni à la gloire ni à l’avenir, ni au pouvoir, ni à la liberté, ni aux rois, ni aux peuples. J’habite seul un grand appartement où je m’ennuie et attends vaguement je ne sais quoi que je ne désire pas et qui ne viendra jamais. Je ris de moi en baillant, et je me couche à neuf heures. J’admire ma chatte qui va faire ses petits, et je suis éternellement votre fidèle esclave; sans travailler, libre d’aller où je veux, et n’allant nulle part. Je regarde passer à mes pieds ma dernière heure.”

As a young man we saw him unable to fix upon any path in life ! too proud, too indolent, and too fastidious for any ; having no object and no purpose, because he himself bounded his own horizon. As a literary man, the same fatal want re-appears : he has grand powers, grand thoughts, grand conceptions even, but no mighty aim outside of the gigantic *MOI* ; no creed but his own genius, no goal but his own glory, no joy but in his own success. When he enters the political arena, the native vice is still uppermost, rampant as ever, and yet more intolerable, because the stage is so noble and the interests are so momentous. In his *Monarchie selon la Charte*, he intimates the *personal* ground on which he so greatly valued parliamentary institutions ; they offer a career and an interest to those who have passed the age of pleasure and are satiated with literary fame. " Was it not," he asks, " very hard to be employed in nothing at an age when one is fit for everything ? To-day the manly occupations which filled the existence of a Roman, and which make the career of an Englishman so noble, are offered to us on all sides. We need no longer lose the middle and the end of our life ; we can now be men when we have ceased to be youths. *We can console ourselves for the lost illusions of our earlier days in endeavouring to become illustrious citizens ; we need not fear time, when one may be rajeuni par la gloire.*" Throughout his Memoirs, whenever he speaks of his political career, his mingled affectation and discontent break out. He repeatedly

tells us that "he has no ambition;" that "there is no renown or power on earth which could tempt him to stoop for an instant to pick it up;"\* that all ministries and embassies and political triumphs are "wretched baubles," far beneath a man like him "qui de mon char domine le train de rois." "Que m'importaient," he exclaims, "pourtant ces futiles misères, à moi qui n'ai jamais cru au temps où je vivais, à moi sans foi dans les rois, sans conviction à l'égard des peuples, à moi qui ne me suis jamais soucié de rien excepté des songes!" All this sounds something worse than paltry, when we remember that this man—without ambition, without political conviction, above all desire for glory, looking down from the height of his fancied supremacy on kings and all that kings could offer, wishing for nothing but repose, caring for nothing but dreams—is the same Chateaubriand who was insatiable in his pursuit of office; implacable towards those who rivalled him; bitter against those who thwarted or refused him; restless and not over-delicate in his intrigues for advancement; ungenerous, to say the least, towards his friends; simply ferocious towards his antagonists; savagely morose under defeat; haughty and contemptuous in success. His one virtue as a politician—and in France, no doubt, it is a great one—was fidelity to his party; a party which he adopted from sentiment and connection, without sharing its principles or being able to guide its policy.

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\* Mémoires, ii. 110, iv. 273, i. 148, iii. 401.

Was his religion of deeper root or purer alloy than his patriotism? Was he truer and less egotistic as a Christian than as a statesman? It is difficult, after what we have seen, to think so. He patronized Christianity: he did not bow down before it. He was its appreciator, not its votary. He cared much for its beauty, little for its truth: he valued it because so closely associated with his fame; but, whether he really believed in it or not, assuredly he never regulated either his feelings by its spirit or his life by its precepts. Few men of decorous life and conversation were ever less imbued with the peculiar virtues of the Christian character. He chose the highest place at feast and synagogue; he thought more highly of himself than he ought to think; and of the spirit of meekness, humility, and forgiveness of injuries he had no more notion than a Red Indian. He was, in truth, one of the most unamiable, as well as one of the most unhappy of men. He really loved no one but himself; he heartily appreciated no genius but his own; his posthumous Memoirs, which he wrote with the view of raising a grand temple to his own fame, are filled with portraits of his contemporaries, scarcely one of which can be called either generous or cordial, few of which are just, and most of which are snarling, bitter, and malignant; some of them, where the originals had defeated or eclipsed him, being painted in colours which transgress even the bounds of decency. We may give one example, among the worst no doubt, but it is by no means unique.

“M. de Talleyrand, appelé de longue date au tribunal d'en haut, était contumace : la mort le cherchait de la part de Dieu, et elle l'a enfin trouvé. Pour analyser minutieusement une vie aussi gâtée que celle de M. de la Fayette a été saine, il faudrait affronter des dégoûts que je suis incapable de surmonter. Les hommes de plaies ressemblent aux carcasses de prostituées : les ulcères les ont tellement rongés qu'ils ne peuvent servir à la dissection.”\*

Talleyrand also left memoirs behind him, but with the direction that they should not be published till fifty years after his death. Chateaubriand's autobiography, assailing and blasting nearly every public and living reputation, was sold during his life-time, and given to the world the same year in which he died.

A great MAN Chateaubriand can scarcely, in any true sense of the word, be called ; his soul was too much eaten away by hollow affectations and puerile vanities for that. But amid all his weaknesses and littlenesses he had the faculty of producing upon his contemporaries the impression of grandeur and strength. A great *writer* he certainly was ; and probably it was his unrivalled capacity in this line that deceived both himself and others into fancying him a thinker and a statesman. He offers, perhaps, the most remarkable instance the world ever saw of the extent to which the power of style can disguise and even supply the absence of higher gifts. We cannot better conclude this long paper than by a few sentences from the pen of Albert de Broglie.

“Between 1814 and 1848, France for thirty-four

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\* Tome vi. p. 242.



years tried her hand at representative government. Three unfortunate tempers have twice led to a sad failure of the trial : a general and systematic spirit of opposition to authority, extravagance of personal pretensions, and the bitterness of personal animosities. Never have these three characteristic national features which render constitutional government almost impossible—appeared so strongly as in M. de Chateaubriand. He was an active public character for fifteen years : he opposed every government ; he put forth pretensions to every post ; and he ended by hating everybody.”



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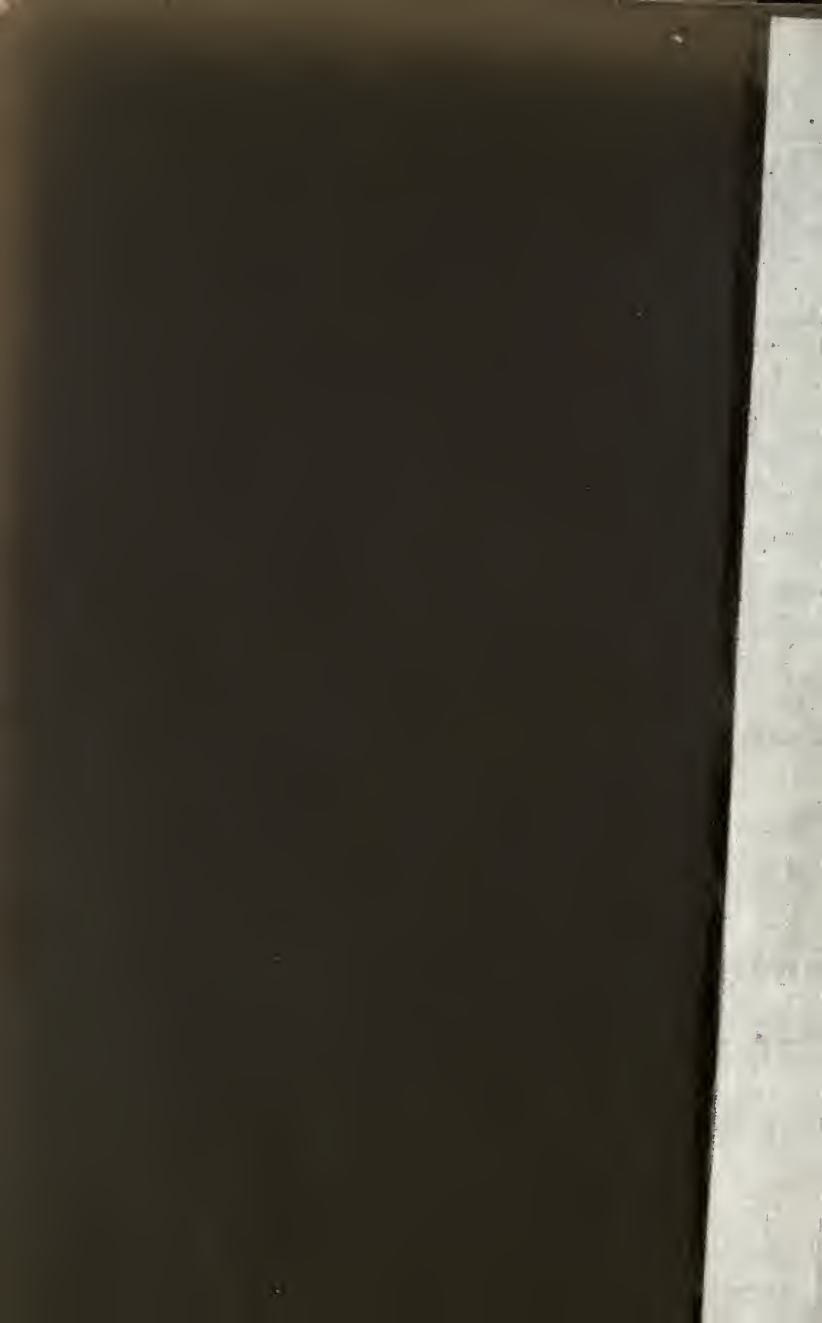
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